

NOBILIS
THE ESSENTIALS

VOLUME I
FIELD GUIDE TO THE POWERS

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JENNA KATERIN MORAN

NOBILIS

by Jenna Katerin Moran

DEDICATION

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In Memoriam: Merry Ruth Conley, David L. Brittain

Special Shout Out to: Robin Michael Alexander Maginn. HI ROBIN

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Nobilis was created by Jenna Katerin Moran (under the name “R. Sean Borgstrom”) under the auspices of David Bolack’s Pharos Press. It was later popularized by James Wallis’ Hogshead Press.

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* modified or adapted by Jenna Moran

Welcome!



The wind told me once that everybody gets to play a game of *Nobilis* before they die. Maybe it's in their secret dreams. Maybe it's in real life. But everybody gets to experience the world of the *Nobilis* once—to leave behind the dead world where things don't talk to you and nobody knows the purpose of the world, for at least one night, and see the truth.

Maybe you got to play the game back when it was a little pink book printed on demand by Pharos Press. Or maybe you got to play it when it was this huge coffee-table book, lavish and elegant, made by Hogshead Publishing, Ltd. and later distributed by Guardians of Order before they decided to stop sending out money and books and stuff and just lurk like a serpent, coiled around the dark heart of the world.

I heard that's what happened to them! I might be wrong. If you've been to the heart of the world then you would probably know.

Anyway, maybe you got to play it that way; or in your dreams, with a mysterious book held by a mysterious referee; or maybe you've even become one of the *Nobilis* yourself, and you don't exactly have to *play* it any more to know.

But if not!

Oh, if not!

Then *this* is the book for you.

The *Nobilis* are all around us, they and their attendant spirits. Everything that you think is a flat and boring object is actually alive, manifesting the amazing cosmic force called the *causa causans* or *spiritus Dei*. The world is full of dangers and wondrous things that hardly anybody knows about. This book will let you play around on the borders of reality, experiencing what's out there. And maybe, just maybe, if you encounter the actual *Nobilis* or something else magical later, and if you've read this book carefully, you'll know what to do!

You might even get to become a Power—one of the *Nobilis*—yourself!

But as every avid Nobiliser knows, it's not about becoming one. It's not about leaving the mortal world behind and entering a world of power and magic where everything is possible but love. It's about keeping the magical world in your heart. It's about keeping your faith in *things* and *being*. The Excrucians are coming with their stars in their eyes and their night-black swords! If you remember the purpose and meaning of things, you can help the world stay strong.

Sample file

Introduction

Get in the Know! on ...

Balloon-People World

This is a secret world (a “Chance!”) where instead of humans the people are colorful balloons. They can twist themselves up into animal or human shapes but doing so reduces their life expectancy. They can also cluster together in the sky to become big cities. Sometimes balloons fall out of the balloon-people world into our world and then they cannot talk or change their shape. If you find seven of them you can tie them into a bunch and fly with them into the balloon-people world, where you will be a hero. But if you want to return home afterwards they will be very insulted and may even drop you from great heights. If you want to visit and come back, you should be sure to have a parachute!

It is usually quite surprising when someone sticks a fundamental building block of reality inside you. You will just be driving along, or whatever, when suddenly *BAM*, you’re Storms. Or Fire. Computers. Dogs. Backsies.¹ Fleece. Or Love.

When something like this is put inside you, you are called **Noble**, or one of the *Nobilis*.

You will find that you are the fundamental expression and guardian of the word or name—the proper term is Estate—that’s stuck inside you. You won’t be able to hide from the fact that you’re a pure and unfettered divinity now. That thing that you sometimes see hiding in the world when you stop blinding yourself to it, that ultimate reality and glory of *things* pressing in through the gates that we construct against the world—

It’s *inside* you, like truth and love and being are inside everybody else, and you’ll realize in just the same way everybody else does not that you are now a god.²

You’ve become, well, Storms: the archetype and arbiter of storms. Or you are now the living Fire. The god of all Computers—of every last computing engine, on all the worlds there are—or the lord of every Dog. You’ve become the inspiring muse to Fleece, the word that speaks to sheep to make it grow. You’ve been made . . . well, it could be anything!

Any of the primal forms. Joy. Emotion. Tea. Baskets. Draconic forms. Martial arts. Even Backsies!

And you have become primal, you have been made fundamental and preeminent, with the placement in you of this primordial thing. You are a Noble. You are a Power. You are sovereign-in-yourself in ways that nations only dream to be.

1 Backsies is when you take back something you already did or said. Why is this a fundamental building block of reality? I think we are forced to blame Aristotle.

If you suddenly find that you are the Power of Backsies, you must be very careful. The Emperor who put the Estate of Backsies in your soul will usually try to take it back again later. Then you will be in trouble because it will kill you to have it taken out again but it will betray your deepest inner truth to tell them No Backsies. The only proper answer to this koan is to stall.

2 For comparison, think about how right now you are *not* realizing that you are a god. That’s because nobody’s stuck an Estate in you.

The *Nobilis* can shatter mountains. They can break or rebuild souls. They don't even have to work very hard to do it. They just have to kind of look at you with their Noble's eyes and *BAM*, you're all broken or rebuilt. Sometimes you'll just go mad.

One look! That's all it takes!

And there are greater things they serve.

When you become a Noble—I mean, you if you get one of these things stuck in you, most likely while the whole world around you is being warped and changed and taken away from Earth into the belly of something else—you are drafted into the service of **the Imperators**. They are the primal forms, the things that precede reality, the Ymerae, the Mashai, the Imperatores Occultes. They are angels, and devils, and they are gods; they are forces of light and dark; they are wild things and tame things and serpents larger than the world.

They are beasts and they are monsters but they are monsters that we cannot judge. They are as the sunrise is, or the wind in summer: the inexpressible source and the foundation of our world. They are not people, not like you and I are people, not like the *Nobilis* are people. They are people-like, in that you can talk to them; you can love them; you can hate them; you can even (should you happen to have natural advantages the like of which I can scarcely imagine) fight them. They have souls, as the theurgists would say. But they are not people. They are not even proper gods. They are reality. They are truth. They are the world before our world, mysteries, arcane and inexplicable breaths of the divine. They are the moving in strange ways, with which miracles are done. They are ineffability and the surpassing of the self. They are the problematic nature of the world, to us. They are, most of all, the true forms, the founding principles, the things of which the things we see are shadows.

If you meet one there is really no recourse but adoration, admiration, the openness and looking-outwards that characterizes the savant occupied by the presence of the world. They are the burden given to us, in living, to learn to live with; we are not *Nobilis*, to define and reexamine the War, the Blood, the Hope, the Love, the Sex, the Cold, the Dreams, the Cats, the Birds, the Bells, and the Days that have been given us. With the Imperatores Occultes, we must simply learn to live.

But ah! The *Nobilis*!

Get the Dope! on ...

Clarissa Kiltbidgei

This is a Power who likes to use her chariot with its glorious red horses even when driving in the mortal world. When she honks her horn it sounds like sun and fire. If you ask her, she will drag you up onto her chariot and ride with you for a day and a night or until she reaches her destination, but if you ask her too many questions she will brand a mark into your forehead and throw you from the craft. She is related to Oscar Toclanny and Maia Sullivan.

They dwell apart from us, the *Nobilis* do, in their great **Chancels**—the secret temple-worlds of their patron spirits, the occulted **Loci** of the Imperators that empowered them. You can find the Chancels if you know how; if you do the right actions, walking the right paths, at the right time. You can walk right from this world into their worlds of magic, wonder, and fantasy. Later we'll even tell you how. And you might find in their Chancel-world a place of Arthurian romance, of knights and mystics and chivalry; London in the 1800s, augmented by dirigibles; a land of kung-fu wonders; a technological future world far beyond our own. Or, of course, some strange, inexplicable and disconcerting world, where balloon-people float in great clusters and make war upon the birds; where robots are ubiquitous and computers are not possible; where the wind that breaks like ocean waves upon the cliffs is full of souls; where humans dwell in hidden homes beneath the forest glens, and butterflies are unto them the messengers of God.³

The *Nobilis* live in their strange Chancels and they venture outwards to our world. Here they will be our heroes and our villains, god-haunted folk, driven by their humanity and their divinity to remake the world. Here is where you are likely to find them—that old man sitting at the end of the bar, that smiling businessman on the street, that woman in her chariot driving in all incongruity the horses of the sun down the busy road outside your home, and squeezing with her hand the bulb of a horn in anger at the traffic on the way.

If you're still half-asleep and not looking out the window, you might not even realize that it's her. You might only put it together later when you realize, "Hey, that horn sounded like sun and fire, like heat and wine; it was a honking and a fury like the passion of a god!"

It is in our world that sometimes they meet the bleak and pretty gods of emptiness, the various **Excrucians**, who come in from outside the world to take away all the names and all the things. They ride in on great black horses and they wield unbearable weapons and there are stars falling in the darkness of their eyes. They are here to excruciate us. They are here to exsanguinate the world, to take from it the *Nobilis* and Imperators and leave us barren of our primal forms. They think they can do as they like in our worlds and in our lives, but sometimes the Nobles come to stop them.

Then, they fight!

³ The local God, anyway. It would be very surprising if the Christian God were to suddenly declare that only forest butterflies in some weird Chancel were His emissaries, and even stranger were this notion to be ratified by the Pope; and everyone would just think he'd gone crazy, anyway, if he did, and hasten him off to the special room beneath the Vatican where the great Papal Computer hums and flashes lights, where the walls are rich with holy doctrines, and where the Cardinals when they are called upon to do so are minded to repair such broken Popes.

ANANDA

Four Imperators run the world. They are the Council of Four, and their names are Ananda, Ha-Qadosch Berakha, Lord Entropy, and Surolam.

They haunt the Noble world just like the *Nobilis* haunt ours.

Ananda is a living principle of beauty. That isn't what he *embodies*—he isn't the Emperor who is Beauty, or defines Beauty. That would probably be Firstborn, or, at least, one of the oldest Angels. It's just what he *is*. His beauty is an apocalypse. It's an out-of-bounds error in the world.

Listen: he visited Mud Falls, Michigan one day and everyone went mad from joy. Mothers stopped feeding their babies. People driving cars stopped steering. The whole town collapsed, became a monstrous disaster area, and the people who survived spent the rest of their lives overwhelmed with happiness and joy and telling anyone who would listen about the fundamental *rightness* of the world.

"It's just! It's bright! It's all *worth it*, in the end!"

That's what the survivors said.

Birds fell from the sky. Then they sang until their hearts burst. And they weren't the only things that were singing. The buildings were rocking back and forth on their foundations, caroling out in their creaky voices a deep and solemn joy. The grass turned to crystal, in Mud Falls, Michigan, and it chimed and glistened as the wind blew across it, and as far as anybody knows, it turned to crystal out of love. Everything was delighted in his visit, but he broke the town and it isn't back to normal yet. That's why he doesn't visit us in the mortal world very often.

What is he?

He is the Emperor of Murder and the Infinite. He is the Lord of the Chancel Cityback. These things *could* be part of the reason that he's beautiful—I am not going to judge people who murder or sum infinite series in his name

Field Guide! to...

Ananda

He is usually voted as the prettiest Emperor. Several pictures of him exist on the web, but they're hard to find due to aggressive intervention by governmental bodies. If you can find one please be careful in viewing it; the pictures are known to induce seizure, soft-tissue hemorrhage, and psychologically addictive levels of euphoria. You can safely view the images through a thick cloth blindfold or eye pillow, and they will retain a substantial amount of their "oomph." Nobiliser Teia Arintheta reports that with a pair of opaque lead goggles, stopped up ears, and a vial of smelling salts affixed under her nose, she was able to approach to within three blocks of Ananda himself without ill effect.



These are the Latter Days of the Law. The world is a shadow of what it was. The joy we know is not the joy we once knew. The sorrow we knew is not the sorrow we once knew. The true passions have passed from the world. All that remains are their pale echoes; and we hold up those echoes and, not knowing history, say, "These are all the truths of the heart that there have ever been."

—from a sign outside Mud Falls, Michigan

because they can probably find out where I live. But it is more likely that he is beautiful to us because of the last and most important thing he is. He is the god and the living principle of the next Age of the world—the time beyond these troubled times, the glorious Fourth Age that is yet to be. That is why his most common titles are **the Lord of Expectations** and **the Emperor to Come**.

Ananda is generally considered the weakest voice on the Council of Four. This is because he does not ever vote against Lord Entropy—at worst, he abstains. He tells us that some terrible disaster will transpire if he and Lord Entropy are ever directly opposed. Some people speculate that Lord Entropy is threatening him, but since nobody shows up in the middle of the night to kill those people, they are probably wrong. It's more likely that Lord Entropy is just not as afraid of whatever that disaster is as is Ananda.

LORD ENTROPY

There is an evil god who rules the mortal world from his hidden Chancel.

He is Lord Entropy.

He is so evil that his hands drip blood even when he's just hanging out watching a basketball game. He is so evil that he can just smile at you and not do anything at all to you and a few years later you'll turn into a degenerate third world dictator like Saddam Hussein.⁴ Some people estimate that as many as 2/3 of all corrupt dictators, CEOs, and other important people are people who met Lord Entropy without knowing it and carry his stain upon their soul.

He is so evil he doesn't have to *try* to be evil; but sometimes, he does.

Sometimes he stops moping around being *moe* and he picks random people off the street, whisks them away to the Locust Court, and puts them on trial for real or facetious crimes. Sometimes he sends the ogres and the nimblejacks that serve him—great brutish thugs and diabolical imps, respectively—out into the world to mess up things that are good, tear down what is bright and virtuous, and in general do nasty things for no other reason than because they can.

⁴ Uh oh! This reference has become outdated! Modern readers can substitute, I dunno, Donald Trump?

Technically he is just one of four—member of a Council of Four, appointed by the Imperators of the world to handle the affairs of mortals, things, and Powers. But he dominates that Council and thus positions himself to make law for the world. Technically he is a hope for the world: he is prophesied to save Creation from the Excrucians, in the end, if he does not betray it. But he is not terribly interested, from all appearances, in being our shining standard, or even, for that matter, in betraying us.

He likes being something everybody fears.

Sometimes it seems like he tries to do a good job ruling the world. It's hard to tell, because he is so virulently corrosive—when everything he touches turns rotten, he has to be at his subtlest when attempting to do things right. But sometimes it seems like he tries to do a good job. And sometimes it seems like he's terribly weary of it. And sometimes it seems like he's the big bad wolf, serving no particular purpose save glorying in his wickedness and waste. Through all these possibilities one theme comes clearly through.

He likes when people fear him.

Of the things he *dislikes*, the most notable is love. It hurts him, or he hates it, or he loathes, fears, or holds some lingering bitterness towards it, or something. He doesn't like that love *exists*. It's not about people loving or not loving *him*—he doesn't seem to want you to, and there's some evidence you physically *can't*,⁵ but that's not the heart of it. Rather, he seems to hate that love exists in the world at all. He's even made a law—

The Windflower Law:

The *Nobilis* shall not love.

It doesn't work very well as a law *qua* law. There are very few Powers in the world who consult with the relevant statutes before deciding whether or not to fall in love. If there is a Power of Being Overly Methodical or a Power of Completely Not Getting What Love is About, they might check whether love is legal or not before falling for somebody. However for the most part the law is not prescriptive but onerous: it serves not to *prevent* love but to *criminalize* it and *make it surreptitious*. Powers may only love

⁵ He's a deeply troubled, handsome, dangerous celebrity, after all. If it were possible to love him, we'd know. But it's more than that, actually. When Internet Nobiliser communities started noticing the glaring absence of people actively crushing on Lord Entropy, people did experiments—trying to fall for him, trying to feel some heat. To summarize the opinion of the community: he's cute, but about as hot as kissing a giant ball of lint fresh from the dryer trap. Interestingly, he doesn't even consider this assessment disrespectful or irritating—at least, people don't seem to die for voicing it—so it's probable that he's either directly responsible for this phenomenon or glad that it exists.



Get the Facts! on ...

Augusta Valentina

He raised my head and looked into my eyes. His fingers left carmine smears under my chin. "You still have spirit," he said, and shook his head. "Do you not understand? I cannot end your torment until it has broken you."

"I'm trying," I told him.

He almost smiled. "I am glad," he said, "that we are working towards the same end. But I am afraid that you are making rather a poor contribution to it."

—from the Thought-Record of Augusta Valentina

Augusta Valentina is the Power responsible for writing *A Philosophy of Treason*, a book detailing the case for serving the Excrucians. If you find this book do not read it as it is most likely a falsified copy that will burn your eyes out and fill your vacant optical cavity with worms. A genuine copy is almost as dangerous. Ms. Valentina herself is a fine conversationalist and quite safe for mortals to socialize with as long as you do not stand too close to her or ask her to expound upon the text.

in secret, and must live in fear that he will discover their love. Many hate him for this, while others close their hearts against love and pretend the law is just.

Lord Entropy is the Imperator of Desecration, Destruction, and Scorn. He is actually one of two different Imperators whose Estate translates into English as "Destruction;" he is Absolute Destruction, while the Angel Za'afiel is Destruction as Part of the Cycle of Life.

Lord Entropy has many servants. He has three extremely competent Powers—Meon, who is the Power of Desecration; Baalhermon, Power of Destruction; and Joktan, Power of Scorn. He has an army of ogres, nimblejacks, and human slaves. In the mortal world he rules the organization known as the Cammora, a secret society that has power over most mortal countries. They provide many services to the Powers, including illegal services; Lord Entropy has decreed the Cammora "invisible to law," so if a Power needs to break Lord Entropy's Law they may hire the Cammora to do it for them.⁶ Lord Entropy has direct influence over many powerful mortals—he often puts invisible "seeds" in the hearts of powerful mortals that can whisper Lord Entropy's wishes to them and sprout, killing them, if they dispute that will. Finally, Lord Entropy has access as a matter of courtesy to many of the resources of the other members of the Council of Four, such as Surolam's Locust Court (which he uses for trials) and the rangers of Ananda's Chancel, the Cityback.

⁶ This is not meant for use with the Windflower Law, since hardly anybody hires the Cammora to fall in love on their behalf. Instead it is invoked with regards to the Chestnut Law, the Crowfoot Law, and the Rule of War.

Lord Entropy's code of Law for the Powers, the Code Fidelitatis, reads—

- ❖ **The Windflower Law:** thou shalt not love
- ❖ **The Chestnut Law:** thou shall harm none who has done no harm, nor wreak more vengeance than in the sevenfold degree
- ❖ **The Rule of Man:** treat no beast as your lord [that is, never let a mortal get the best of you]
- ❖ **The Rule of War:** serve your Emperor before the War, and the War before yourself
- ❖ **The Crowfoot Law:** protect no Power from the justice of the Code

His Code for mortals is simpler, inasmuch as he gives us one at all:

“Be as I Would Have You Be”

He is called **the Bloody Emperor or the Darkest Lord**.

SUROLAM

Surolam is the dog-headed god of ordinary things. She is part of the Great Boundary—the fiery cup that surrounds the whole world; the wall between souls; the walls around the mind that keep us sane. She is stability and order and things making sense. She is specifically the Emperor of Willpower, Law, and the Broken-Hearted.

The world is full of extraordinary things, and sometimes that is painful.

For instance, most people—when they see miracles—get hurt by them. They start to realize that their world doesn't make sense. That what they think of as *important* doesn't make sense, and isn't very important; that what they think of as *necessary*, or *natural*, or *correct*, doesn't mean much either. They see that everything they believed was *true* was just something in their head. And that hurts them. And Surolam is the answer to that pain.

Field Guide! to...

Surolam

This is an Emperor who protects ordinary life from disruption. She allows people to remain ignorant of magic and get by in an ordinary way in a world torn by mystic forces at war. If you want to visit her you can find her temples listed in your local Yellow Pages; they are not recorded alphabetically but instead placed between two advertisements picturing dogs or two names with a dog-like meaning. You can also look for the most ordinary things and people possible and ask them if they have recent information on the dog-headed god of ordinary things.

Field Guide! to ...

Lord Entropy

You can recognize Lord Entropy by his bloody hands. If that is not enough of a clue—e.g. if you're in a surgery or arresting a murderer—you can also recognize him by the scarab symbol he often wears, or by the nimblejacks and ogres he might have with him. If you meet him you should give him several obeisances as if he were an Emperor but then talk to him or ignore him as if he were anybody else. If you meet his ogres or nimblejacks when he is not around, there is no point in hiding, fighting, or running away. Instead pretend to be a very dull and uninteresting person and they may ignore you or hurt you just a little bit.

On the other hand, if you would like to distract ogres and nimblejacks from somebody else, running away is a very good strategy. Like hunting dogs, competitive runners and police officers, Lord Entropy's minions are compelled by a biological instinct to chase down anything that runs, and while nimblejacks can catch you almost instantly they are likely to play with you instead.

She is the power that we have to forget the extraordinary and pretend that our ideas and lives make sense. Each person has a pair of Surolam's gates in their heart that, flanked by two of her dogs, lead to a place of retreat from the raw madness that is the world. And it's not just people, either—everything in this world is secretly alive, and everything that lives has access to her balm.

She is something we can turn to when we go outside and there is something ravaging and blasphemous on our street. She is our hope and our salvation when we go home and find we have a nameless Thing instead of a kitchen, or have our hearts brushed by the passage of an Excrucian's wing. She is the mortal's only answer against miracles.

Straight Up Nobilis Secrets! ...

Dementia Animi

An ordinary person who sees miracles can catch the psychological disease, “dementia animi.” This is the sickness where you start talking to your toaster and other objects and telling all your friends that you are just a shadow of the true things in the world. This is an accurate perspective but not a functional one and will lead you to a bad end. To avoid this disease, practice ironic detachment from reality; then, when reality suddenly changes, you can make snide comments instead of going mad. Alternately, hold in mind that you may always find the succor of Surolam, through any pair of dog-flanked gates, and in this fashion recover from the burden of your disease.

If our need is great enough we can find her in person—
Not just in spirit.

We can find a pair of dog-flanked gates, or one of Surolam's temples, and go through and in, and pass into a place of musty sanctuary and comfort. There we can recover, and wait, and if we wait long enough, receive an audience with her.

Then, when we leave, we will forget.

People forget. Spirits forget. Even animals forget. It's really only the insects that remember. They crawl in and out between our world and hers all the time. That's why sometimes you can get insects that just seem to appear inside your house, and it's why her Chancel is named the Locust Court.

We can appeal to her there for more than solace. We can ask her for aid, and she might even give it. She is kind, you see, and loves us more the more we are broken-hearted. But she is also a creature of Law and a creature of precedent, and so she is very careful not to commit to more than she can give to all of us, and each of us, forever. The decisions she does make, the promises she does give, bind her for centuries or even millennia—they are written down and thrown into the great Swamp of Precedent in the distant reaches of the Locust Court, where the testaments, effects and language of her previous decisions sink slowly into a great ink-and-paper bog and mix bit by bit with one another in decay, and where strange trees and flowers grow.

In her realm there is a truce between insects, fungi, diseases and the larger creatures. For this reason, passage through it will often free you of disease or infestation, or, conversely, cause you to act as a vector.



When God lost love to the Devil in a dicing match, he had to trade both the luminiferous ether and Creation science away to get it back. Most savants agree that the trade was worthy; yet it is indubitable that the world has made less sense ever since.

—from *THE CURRENT SCORE*, by Walden Fargo,
writing on the topic of the Ordinary

HA-QADOSCH BERAKHA

... *Ha-Qadosch Berakha treats the world as his playground*⁷ ...

Oopsie-Daisy! on ...

The Locust Court

In the previous edition I erroneously proposed that the Locust Court belonged to a Darklord named Medan and described its fields as teeming with carnivorous, flesh-eating locusts. I regret to confess that a suggestive title spurred me on to paroxysms of speculation and flights of sheerest fantasy which were not caught in editing; apologies tendered, and forgiveness earned, let us put this matter swiftly and entirely behind us.



⁷ Yeah, that's all you get! ... well, you were meant to get an illustration of him, too, but that didn't happen this time.

For now, you can think of him as, maybe, like, Ha-Qadosch *Section Break*-a? And then, just assume that the book is misassembled from there?

Like, just *look* at that suspicious blank space. What kind of layout designer would just *leave* that there?



Beware! the poison of a wood-witch sting! Debilitating within 72 hours; fatal, within a week; and unacknowledged in its entirety by modern medicine, its only redeeming feature is the crowds of cheerful woodland creatures it will attract to you, to help you with both your chores and finding love (until you die).*

* **ProTip!** This can also be a symptom of anxiety.

C. Maw

Sample file

Your Imperator



Imagine the Imperators as crystal snakes: blue crystal, green crystal, red crystal—every color in the world. Where do the snakes come from? They create themselves, pulling themselves by force of will from nothingness. The snakes writhe one about another, a blind, squirming, undulating mass. From above, there shines a light.

It passes through the crystal snakes and forms a pattern of shifting, mixed, twisted colors on the void. That is Creation.

—from KEYS OF SEXTILIUS,
by Eachan Sobalet

Who is your Imperator?

One day if you become a Power an Imperator will appear out of nowhere and put one of its Estates in your soul. It is like putting coffee in a cup or breathing into a balloon animal's flat and lifeless body. Divine breath will inflate you. It will transform you. It's like waking up unexpectedly from the long and weary burden of your life, only now you've got a new and completely different problem.

Your Imperator!

This is called **Commencement**.

Maxwell Murdoch was busy taking classes and cultivating acne when the Serpent of Radar suddenly sounded in his soul. It echoed off every part of him. It made his chest into a chamber. It made him one of the Powers of the world. No more classes! No more acne! Suddenly the only thing that was wrong with his life was that he'd been adopted by a 250-mile-long snake made mostly out of sound who insisted that he rule the northern quarter of a fairyland and fight the Excrucian gods of emptiness on its behalf.

Julianne Ling thought she'd live out her whole life as a sixty-four-year-old waitress, modulo incremental adjustments to the age. Then the fires of the Damned Angel Larinien burst up from the linoleum around her and remade her body and soul into the Power of the Weft. At this point she stopped having to worry about boredom and aging but started having to worry about having a close professional and personal relationship with an angel thrown out of Heaven for being an evil rebel. It was a tradeoff.

It'd basically be like that for you.

You'd be a Power because an Imperator chose *you* and filled you up with its *it*ness.

Imperators do this because they need Powers to protect them.

That's not a universal truth! They're not helpless. They're even technically invincible. It's just that the best way they can fight the Excrucians is to leave their body and journey in mysterious spirit realms. While they are doing this they don't want to worry all the time about whether their body is under attack from armed enemies and Excrucian agents or not. So they make Chancels to keep their body safe, and Nobles to protect them. Once they've done this they can also offload most of their work on Earth to the *Nobilis*. So while the Serpent of Radar roams the subtle worlds, Maxwell Murdoch keeps its Chancel and its body safe. And while Larinién skips off to Hell for melty ice cream socials or torturing damned souls or whatever, Julianne Ling guards her interests here on Earth.

If an Imperator claims you, your life will be just that way!

Before the Excrucian War, Imperators didn't make many Powers. When they did it was a kind of sacred marriage or adoption. It was a two-way process. It's been adapted to modern needs a little bit but it's still basically two-way and it's still basically a *relationship*. That's why Powers keep their free will and their choice of morality even when their Imperators disagree. It's why Heth can get away with serving the Code of Hell while belonging to the Angel Euphoriel. It's why the Darklord Erevan Insanguine tolerates his Powers, who are uniformly bright. You don't necessarily get any say in whether or not an Imperator claims you, and the balance of power between you can be lopsided to the point of slavery, but once they've claimed you they become yours as much as you are theirs. Your hearts fall into tune.

So what kind of Imperator would choose you?

There are—

- glorious Angels in this world, from the shining host of Heaven;
- terrible Devils (the Fallen Angels) who worship at the altar that is Hell;
- stern Magisters of the Light, seeking humanity's survival;
- malevolent Magisters of the Dark, celebrants of our filth and suicides;
- alien, incomprehensible divinities: the "True Gods" of Earth;
- chaotic Magisters of the Wild, more alien yet, from outside the universe entirely; and
- the miles-long Aaron's Serpents, born from the substance of the World Ash.

The sea serpent Rahaytz was, alone among its kind, distressed at its lack of arms and hands. It would impress hapless human sailors into its service, using them to fetch, manipulate, and carry for the monstrous beast as long as they remained alive.

—from *A MEDIEVAL BESTIARY*, by Paul McArthur



Get the Deets! on ...

The Serpent of Radar

Someday dharma may call upon you to sing the Serpent of Radar and bring it back from the principalities of death. This snake is approximately 250 miles long and composed principally of sound; it is the Imperator of Self-Creation, Hypothetical Entities, Difficulty, Excitement, and Radar. To sing its name is to spit it from your mouth and out into the world; three times it has returned from death in just this fashion, and twice from far but living realms. Note that in calling it back you are giving up your own life as the price; spitting out a 250-mile-long snake, even if it is mostly sound, is almost inevitably fatal.

Of these all it is the Aaron's Serpents you would find the mildest masters. They are terrifying in their physical extent and prowess, but generally humane of mind and philosophical of character.

If you were claimed by an Angel or a Magister of the Light, you would receive a more difficult destiny. Bright creatures such as they impose great rigors on their Powers, and demand a great exactitude. They would task you to heal great wounds, make redress to great wrongs, defeat great monsters, perform great works, and serve in the redemption of lost things. The world's need for beauty and salvation will not falter: your labors would be endless, but at least there would be glory, honor, and purpose in it all.

If a Devil or a Magister of the Dark claimed you, your lot would not be so bright. They would be casual in hurting you, in pushing you, in testing your morality and survivability almost to destruction. They would show you how saving your beloved from certain death would bring the ending of the world. They would call it a salutary lesson, or an amusing jest, to temporarily replace your bones with molten lead. They are the most terrible expressions of the causes that they serve—the Devils more hideous and cruel than the Code they follow, and the Dark more vile and treacherous. They are servants of honorable and good causes that have much to recommend them but they are irredeemable cosmic horrors in themselves.

Imagine it! To be one of a Devil's Powers, lifted up and made into a god, given reign over some great cosmic principle—from Raphi, who is Judgment; or Cedron, who is Growth; or Domiel, who is the Experience of Burning—and at the same time and the same moment, made a pawn to something that loves corruption and despair? To be bound by a doomed and tainted intimacy to them, to know that they are yours and you theirs and that the connection is empowering, mutual, and forever while they are so monstrous and so cruel? Or to serve Araunah of the Dark and dwell in the manner of a joyous god in the fairyland he rules; while *feeling*, through that Lord, the will of every chemical fume that chokes, every caustic splash that scars, every chemical burn that strips the flesh from some poor human's bones?

The angel sheltered Abolibamah with his wings, and not all the fierceness of the deluge could pierce that feathered shield.

—translated from *EXODUS*, by Gagni Snaebjorn of the Ljos-Alfar

Perhaps you could find peace with it. Some do. Perhaps you could work brightness from it. Some do, again. There is no redeeming the Devils or the Dark, but there is good in them to find. Or perhaps you would simply serve the world as best you could and pray the War would kill you soon.

Or would it be an alien thing that claims you?

The True Gods are shapeless, formless creatures. They are earthly gods but they are not human gods; rather, they are kin to the amoebas, the fungi, the insects, and the plants. They are alien to us as the flora of our stomach are alien, as the things that grow in our refrigerators are alien, as the residents of volcanic tunnels, dark swamps, and the ocean deeps are strange. They are fundamentally compatible with the human animal, but not with the human person; in practice, a tension exists.

You would find service to a True God a unique and uncategorized experience. What strange drives would it make you privy to? To which of its archaic, primordial moods would you be subject? What would its nature be, what would be the manner of its complexities? These things we cannot say. In dreaming up a fictional True God, as in **Imperator Creation** on pg. 139, you'll have endless scope for creativity; facing one in reality, endless opportunities for surprise!

And then there are the Magisters of the Wild. They are not just alien to *us* but to the entirety of the world. They have no roots in reality, no context, no relationship to any other thing. They present themselves not as a natural part of Creation, but as strangers who stumbled into it and found themselves integrated into its flesh. Their alienness is so profound as to seem simple in practice—their nature is described by a handful of simple rules, which appear to arise

ex nihilo and without regard to our moral and physical laws. For example, Kaithrya of the Wild opposes stasis, brings forth green and growing things and returns what is given to her threefold. Cut off one of her arms, she will cut off three of yours; if you have only two, she is not deterred and will in good time find a way. Epikleros Chimeric is a Wild Magister who may not be captured, touched, caught, or accurately described; its presence in our world gives rise to paradoxes. Where Achaz walks, the dead arise; feasibility is no concern.

Imagine it, then!

Such a thing burns into your life. An Angel or a Devil; a Magister of Light or Dark; a creature of the Wild, or the Primeval, or a Serpent from the Tree! They strike you like a meteor: like a catastrophe and a transfiguration, falling like thunder from the seemingly clear sky, entering your life from outside the ordinary boundaries of your world. They take the city around you, or some area more nebulously defined, and fold it up into a Chancel. They estrange it and you from the country you've lived in, they infuse the area with their magic, they make the place a magic temple reachable only by strange paths. Then they choose you—you, of all mortals—to infuse with an Estate.

You are suddenly a Power. You are suddenly bound to them and to the world. You are suddenly the Prince or Princess of the hidden Chancel. You are suddenly a Sovereign Power in the world.

And you are not alone, for lo! your **Familia Caelestis** have also been chosen; your “family of Powers,” that is, those bound to the same Chancel and Imperator you serve.

Were you alone, or deeply rooted in the world?

Is this a blessing, or a monstrous curse?

Bane or boon, there is no help for it. From the moment you are chosen, your Imperator has set its mark on you. To become a Power is to gain a new family, new responsibilities, and a new fate.

Hidden Secrets! of ...

Kaithrya of the Wild

Kaithrya is a six-armed Imperator crowned with a coronet of thorns and flames. Her exhalation is a blue mist that gives rise to Spring. She is nominally invisible but the appearance of Spring, particularly an unseasonable Spring, indicates and reveals her presence. At such times it is wise to make such gifts to her as you can afford, and that you can afford to have returned threefold. For instance, do not offer her your life, as having three lives is damnably complex, but consider offering her money, a small meal, a month of free Internet service, or a fixed time period of acting kindly in her name. Do not under any circumstances offer her your love or one third of your dedicated service. The threefold love of a deity is potentially fatal, and entrapping any creature of the Wild into your service invites your extirpation from the world.



Sample file

An Atlas of Creation

Get the Scoop! on...

Sucky Things

These are the random bad things that can happen to you in the ordinary world. On the plus side bad things happening to you does not mean you are a bad person. On the minus side bad things will happen to you even if you are a good person. In the end you are just another victim of the motivationless malice of directed acyclic causal graphs.

PROPERTIES OF THE ORDINARY WORLD

- ❖ Its locations are relative;
- ❖ Its particulars are measurable;
- ❖ Its particulars are explainable;
- ❖ Its particulars exert causal force;
- ❖ Its events have causes;
- ❖ These causes are impersonal;
- ❖ These causes are amoral.

THE ORDINARY WORLD

Let us be blunt: the world as we know it is a lie.

It is a shelter. It is a hiding place from the law of karma. It is a crèche in the big bad universe where nothing is morally fraught in and of itself. Where things only matter because of humans observing purpose and judgment into them, where things *just happen*, rather than *happening because*. Where the closest thing to a higher purpose is our inability to really call one purpose higher than another. It is a world of the *objective*, and it is a lie.

On a fundamental level the world of our ordinary reality is the world where nothing “chooses”: where there are no gods in the clouds to make them rain, no gods in the cars to make them run, no *telos* for growing, evolving things to grow towards and not even really a god inside the brain to make the human being be. There are only laws of motion, laws of chemistry, and laws of chaos—the decipherable rules by which things, encountering other things, react.

This isn't neutral.

To make our soulless world we balled the flat Earth up and made it round. We made flat and lifeless the spirits of nature. We stripped away the world tree from our skies and made an endless dark of space instead. We took *ourselves*, and made ourselves the lightning in the meat, the clicking and clacking and sparking of the synapses inside our brain.

We didn't really want to kill our souls.



Hidden Secrets! of...

Za'afiel

This is the Angel of Destruction. He killed all of the dinosaurs and helped to create the scientific model of the world. If you ever meet Za'afiel do not lecture him about the dinosaurs. First, he feels bad enough already, and second, he is a hot-tempered immortal angel embodying the very principle of destruction.

We didn't even really want to murder the gods in the sky, or slaughter the *telos*, or turn everything that was wild and beautiful and strange into computable or even incomputable arcs.

But to unleash ourselves from karma, it's what we had to do.

It was the only way to get away from the ways in which the world was broken. It was the only way to say that the world we live in isn't the world we participated in making.

I think we are afraid the world will blame us.

There is a story that the Powers tell, that the scientific world began when the angel Za'afiel smote the Earth. It was before humans were around, or at least, they were in Eden, but the dinosaurs were there, and one of them defecated on or near an angel.

And so Za'afiel smashed the Earth.

And the Earth couldn't just say, "That wasn't my fault." Because whenever you say that something isn't your fault, what you're really saying is, that *could* be my fault. Maybe. There's something there. Maybe I'm just an ugly and broken enough world, what with dinosaur digestive issues and all, that I deserve K-T extinction events.

So instead it did things *one* better, and said: of course I don't deserve that, because *there's no such thing as deserving*.

That's the world we're living in.

And over the years, we've just refined it. The longer we've studied the mechanisms of the world, the more complex, far-reaching and beautiful they've become.

But the problem is it isn't real.

The world isn't really like that. No relativity. No chemistry. It's not even really round.

The planet orbiting the sun, somewhere in the Milky Way—that's a dream, a lie, an illusion, a process built out by science even as we explore it, which the Imperators of the world have chosen to maintain. It's a lie the True Gods of Earth use to shelter them from the eyes of Heaven. It's a lie the Imperators of the Light and Dark⁸ have chosen to back for reasons of their own.

And Surolam to protect us, for we shatter when we *see* that it is false.

And Lord Entropy, I think, because it amuses him.

And Ha-Qadosch Berakha and Ananda, for reasons of their own.

⁸ The Imperators, that is, of human prowess.

PROSAIC REALITY

The ordinary world maintains itself. If something miraculous happens that changes everything, it updates the entire model—the entire history and dynamics of the world—to fit.

In Aristotle's day this was an easy hack.

These days the model that is the ordinary world is deep, complex, and intricate. The pressure of human inquiry forces it constantly to expand, to reshape, to develop, to mature. Things that were not connected, connect. Things that needed no explanation, become explained. The world has become so thoroughly mapped and linked together that a single miracle—say, putting a small planet in the sky, or knocking one away—requires vast amounts of retroactive continuity to explain.

Even changing one person's mind can, in the end, force a recreation of all history, and the positions of the stars.

It's a strain on the engine of the world. That's why sometimes you'll see miracles, even though you're not supposed to be able to. That's why you might encounter something impossible and learn the true nature of things and have it force you from that cradle which is the ordinary world. Maintaining the perfection of the ordinary is too hard, and afflicting you with *dementia animi*—the madness of seeing spirits and miracles—is easy.

It's not sustainable. Prosaic reality, I mean. Lately the *Nobilis* have been finding more and more often that their miracles don't get explained away at all—that covering up the consequences and keeping the ordinary world intact is *their* job, not the world's.

This is the curse that science brings. This is why it is a burden on the world. This is why *animals* who try to do science get eaten by large predators or struck down by Heaven's flames; why shopping carts may not study physics; why a dog or rock that charts the stars enacts a forbidden practice. For better or worse, though, humanity is a special case; see the story of Adam and Eve, on pg. 40!



It's our broken little crib, our shelter, our hiding place. We've been decorating it, lately, sprucing it, making it awesome and complex and beautiful. But it's still just our crib.

It's not the fundamental law.



Get the Deets! on...

Sennacherib

This is the Emperor of Perception, Vapor, and Falling Stars. The ordinary world is made of Sennacherib's flesh—you can think of Sennacherib as the book that holds the story of the world, the computer that holds its simulation, or the veil that drifts between the vision and the thing. If you transfer into the Physics Department of Georgetown University you will find yourself in Sennacherib's Chancel, most likely to your sorrow.

VISIONS OF THE CITYBACK

Sometimes you'll pull aside a curtain, or look down an alley, or lift up the lid of a dumpster, and instead of seeing ordinary things you'll see the Cityback.

It's under, it's in back of and it's behind the cities of the world.

It's the thing that makes us urban.

The Cityback is huge. It's hungry. It takes one death a day just to exist—speaking candidly, it takes one *murder* a day, one soul ripped unwholesomely from life—to feed the miracle of its being there at all.

It's why we can have cities.

It's why we can have stores, and malls, and art, and hamburgers, and science. It's the madness behind the sanity. It's the machine that dreams of modern life. It's Ananda's contribution to the infrastructure behind our ordinary world.

If city life has made you soft, don't go.

Close the curtain. Close the lid. Shudder, and turn, and walk away. Don't walk through that gate to the drumming thunder of the wild urban world. The things that live there *look* like the things of your ordinary life. But they are wild. They are *wild*. And they will not be tamed.

PROPERTIES OF THE CITYBACK

- ❖ If it hasn't died, then it's alive;
- ❖ If it's alive, it must consume energy to survive and grow;
- ❖ If it's alive, its life cycle features infant, child, and adult stages;
- ❖ If it's alive, it has the potential for reproductive sex;
- ❖ If it's alive, it can adapt to its environment;
- ❖ If it's alive, taming it kills it;
- ❖ If it's dead, it rots and fades away.

Take fire stations as an example. They are alive until they're killed. That means there are baby fire stations. It means there is fire station sex. Fire stations have to eat something to survive—in this case Ananda-bestowed energy, but it could have been "fire" or "fire trucks" in a slightly different world. Fire stations in Cityback are aware enough to adapt to their environment. When they are tamed or killed they rot and fade away, returning their biological resources to the environment.

URBANA AND INFRASTRUCTURA

Most of the Cityback is ordinary city, or close thereto. Like in the Mythic World, everything is alive, and everything has a spirit, and if you look carefully you can find it—but only *some* of the spirits in the Cityback are "urbana," wild spirits. The rest are simply more primeval, less focused on humanity, less integrated into a coherent urban environment than their cousins in the Mythic World.

Infrastructure is most likely to be safe. Major streets and highways, government buildings, libraries, fire departments, aqueducts, and public schools and hospitals are the passive underpinning of the ecosystem. They receive their life energy directly from Ananda and thus have no real need to crunch human bones or savagely murder urbana for their life. Street lights, library books, fire trucks and ambulances, and other forms closely associated with such infrastructure are generally safe unless provoked: most fire engines will be tame spirits that wandered in from the broader world, and even the wild ones will be unlikely to set you on fire, for instance, or spear you with their great stinger-ladders, unless you threaten them or the fire station that they serve.

The rest of the Chancel is crawling with the city's life.

Examples include the:

AGRICORDS

Agricords are wild zeppelins; they trawl the streets with filament-ropes hoping to catch up their prey. In the broader Earth, zeppelins and *agricorda urbana* are practically extinct; in the Cityback, they proved remarkably well-adapted to the environment, and only continuing predation by Aeroplanes, Arpakti, and Psalidars keep them from a population explosion that would fill the urban skies.

The standard technique for surviving an agricord attack is fire, or to swing under the sheltering balcony of some fat tenement beast and scrape off the agricord filament against its rail. However, if you are dragged up to an agricord unarmed, you may attempt to tickle its underbelly with broad strokes of your hand to lull the creature to sleep before it drags you into its digestive chambers. Be prepared to grab hold of the filament as it goes lax, lest you exchange one problem for another.

KRYPTONS

Kryptons are slow, vicious predators. They cling to the sides of ordinary streets with their maws open wide. Deceptive luminance inside their epiglottal tract appears to be street lamps, but the patterns of the light and the reflective properties of their upper mouth confuse the eye. If you are not looking carefully it will appear that the top of the krypton is actually the sky and you will walk directly to their stomach. If you are tired, drunk, or inexperienced, you should never walk into a Cityback alley without first tossing a matchmouse or lightermouse in, in case a krypton wishes to deceive you.

OMBUDSMEN

The ombudsmen of Ananda have their headquarters in the Cityback.

They are the heroes that keep our urban world alive. They slip between the Cityback, the ordinary world, and the Border Mythic (below). They use the powers they've learned from life amidst urbana to keep the human world intact. Their job, given them by Ananda, is to ensure the healthy growth and development of human society and technology—to keep the arrow of progress pointing forward. Thus his scientific ombudsmen expose falsified research, cut through bureaucratic limitations, and help inspire great works. His “clerks of the factories” hunt down the creatures that prey on factory workers and ensure that the industrial base of society remains functioning. The rangers of convenience, deeply in tune with the urbana of Cityback, protect the stores and the minimalls and keep the flow of commerce moving. Ananda's princes of crime and punishment, ombudsmen of vice and prosecution, oversee the delicate ecosystems of the police and criminals alike. These groups, in sum, are the secret societies of the Cityback that stand between society and the chaos that eats at its foundation. They are heroes; and the greatest of them eventually earn an audience with Ananda himself, witnessing his beauty and dying to it in a joyous, apothecotic madness.

BRONTAGORA

The lumbering brontagora, or “thunder-markets,” consider humans a symbiotic species; they will smash open supply trucks and feast on the goods inside, but cannot digest them until they have sat on the gastric shelves long enough to spoil. The more often humans raid those shelves for fresh goods, the more efficient the brontagora's digestion becomes. Bristles on the inside of the brontagora's doors scrape accessible paper and coin from human symbiotes when the human departs, cleansing and freshening the humans and protecting them from the spiritual dangers of wealth. Humans compete for this symbiosis with the xedlipods, nasty packs of carnivorous cart-creatures, who prefer to pick the bones of the ruined supply trucks but will raid a brontagora shelf if sufficiently hungry or turn on a passing human who seems weak. If you are under attack by xedlipods your best option is stairs; these wheeled creatures are unable to traverse them, and are more likely to circle the base of the stairs and whine metallically than hunt out an

accessible ramp and come at you from behind. That said, in a modern xedlipod-accessible world, it's better to seek an escape route sooner than later once a stairway has gotten you some distance.

TETRIMMENOS

The ttrimmenos are human-faced computer-creatures that prowl the Cityback on four to sixteen spindly legs. Their modes of being vary. Vistal Ttrimmenos are apex predators, ripping the control systems from captive electronica and reassembling the rest into mindless scrap-servitors, spinning great webs in dark corners of the city to catch electronic and human prey, and devouring even brontagora or tenement beasts when forced. Pocal Ttrimmenos are niche vermin, scuttling along the streets and living off ambient electronic fields. Tigris Ttrimmenos, forty feet in height, stride with mysterious grandeur through the ways of Cityback, unstoppable by anything short of an enraged skyscraper or Vistal Ttrimmon and with a means of subsistence that is principally mysterious. All of the ttrimmenos function to assist in the computation of the ordinary world, essentially supporting with the lightning of their thoughts the miraculous effort that makes it possible for mundane reality to exist in an underlying world dominated by spirits, miracles, and freakish eccentricities. They are, like Cityback itself, a treasure of Ananda, Lord of Expectations, Imperator of the Fourth Age that is to come.

THE LOCUST COURT

From the Long Hall of the Locust Court arises a sensation of being held safely in the arms of a higher power. Everywhere along the pews are humans and animals that have drifted off to sleep, forgetting their petitions and their purposes to fade into dreamless sweet-scented rest. Some sleep for months or even years, ignoring the insects that crawl along their bodies but do not bite.

One may walk indefinitely through the Long Hall, looking for an exit, and not find it; it is in *sudden revelation*, *a moment of anxiety*, or *waking* that one finds the doors.

A sense of sacred timelessness—where every action and word has been destined or at least known since time's beginning, and will linger to time's end—pervades the Swamp of Precedent. What you witness here you will never forget; it becomes part of you. It is a good place for honest declarations of love, or for speaking bluntly to a partner in negotiation. To lie in this swamp is a terrible crime against your soul, and risks transforming you into a creature for whom that lie is truth.

Ombudsman Bonds and Afflictions

Bond (2): I understand the world around you.

Bond (1): I want to help you.

Bond (1): I'll survive anything you throw at me.

Affliction (1): Urban spirits like me.



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SAMPLE

TALES OF THE EVIL WORLD

There is a seed of evil inside the human eye. It twists and writhes and sometimes we see evil instead of what is there.

We're looking at a street.

Then bam! Evil twists in our eye, and we're looking at Samael St. Augustine, the Evil Street.

We're looking at those guys down the way.

Bam! They're not guys. They're ogres.

And lightning flashes, and suddenly we realize that we're standing in the Evil World, and maybe we've always been.

It's not really in our eyes. That's too literal. If evil lived in the eyes then you could cut it out and throw it on the ground and stomp on it like Chihiro did in **Spirited Away**.

It's in our eyes, but it's not *just* in our eyes.

It's in our whole *capacity to perceive*.

Maybe it's a natural part of how we know the world. Maybe it's not, maybe it's a curse or something inflicted on us, because Imperators could do that. Heck, even Powers could do that, Meon or Joktan or whatever could have made it so. But whatever the reason, it's part of our existence. Sometimes we see what we see and know what we know. Sometimes we see or know the evil world instead. Sometimes we touch things. Or people. Sometimes we touch the evil world instead. There's something in our *heads*, some twitching antenna that can tell when evil's *near*, and that awareness wriggles into view. It's like a flopping fish or a dying worm. It's like it's *distressed*. Like evil is distressed that it has to live in the same world as people as bad as us.

Sometimes your soul will hollow out and there will be a great static of the mind and that's the tendrils of Sa'a Lingerth, the beast of the evil world.

Sometimes there's a *gap* in the things you think.

Sometimes you look *around* and the Island of Lord Entropy has pushed its way into the world.

It appears when we see it. I don't think it's causal, exactly. I probably wouldn't tell you about it if I thought it was. If I thought it *needed* you to see it in order to appear, if I thought that I was *dooming* you to evil when I described these things and filled your head with these thoughts then I probably wouldn't describe them.

But I don't think it's causal, exactly.

I only know that it's how it comes to pass. It's the *way it happens*.

We think we might see some ogres. Then we see some ogres. We think that building gargoyle's actually a nimblejack. We look closer. We don't want to look, but we have to know. We're scared. And maybe it seems like *yes*, it really could be, it really could be a nimblejack. And we look *a little closer*—

And it's moving like the wind, its horrid wrinkly face and claws and the long, long reaching of its limbs, and we scream, and fall backwards, but it's not looking for us, not today, it has other business in the Earth, this creature of the Evil World.

That didn't happen to me. I tell myself that didn't happen to me, that never happened to me, and that it won't come back. Ianthe says I don't run fast enough to be interesting hunting anyway.

There's *something*, that's our first sign.

There's *something*. Then we become aware of it. Then we begin to worry: is this Meon smiling at us? Is this Joktan laughing at us? Is this Baalhermon coming like the fire and the sword to smash our world?

Lightning flashes. Forms distort. We see the evil world; and it is there.

Darkness falls on our room. Our closet seems to fill with horrid things. *And they break through*.

The evil world hunts us. It is the thing that hunts us. It is the thing that knows us through our fear. It is the thing that knows us through our hatred of it; that knows us by the fact that we see evil in the world when previously it was not there.

In fairness, we are right to be afraid.

Ogres eat people. They're the nicer ones, too; the nimblejacks will do a lot worse to you than eat. Even Lord Entropy's human servants are always doing evil. We can't get away from them entirely, not unless everybody in the world stops seeing evil, so we might as well anticipate it ourselves.

Lord Entropy doesn't care about humanity. Sometimes he hurts people, sometimes he doesn't. That's one kind of fear. If you're a mortal person, then maybe one day he'll hunt you, not because you've done anything wrong, but because being mortal means that you're not worth giving any say in whether he hurts you or not.

If you're a Power, it's even worse.

If you're a Power, then there is no practical way that you have never done him wrong. There is no way you've never loved. There is no way you've never accidentally hurt an innocent. There is no way you've been perfect in your service to the War. I guess it's technically possible, but seriously—*never? Not at all?*

If you're a Power, one day he might decide to hunt you and it will officially be your fault.

Get in the Know! on...

Samael St. Augustine

This is a street and a row of shops that longs to see you dead. It's full of people with fanged mouths, expressionless slit eyes, and fleshy hand-shaped gloves on the outside of their real hands. You can tell you're on Samael St. Augustine because that's what the street signs will tell you. If you ever find yourself there, walk but do not run away.

The Evil World is an island. It is an island riding on a beast. It is surrounded by storms.

In the center of that world is the palace of black glass.

On his throne in the palace is the evil god Lord Entropy, and his fingers always drip with blood.

He is attended by ogres and by nimblejacks.

To his left, in the eastern palace, there is Joktan. He stands over the palace like a giant, his shadow massive on the clouds. Joktan, whose laughter fills the air. He is laughing at you right now. He is laughing at you because he hates you and because he knows that you will suffer. He is laughing because it is marvelously funny how terrible things will happen to you, and how terrible you are.

Baalhermon holds the palace of the west and stands at Lord Entropy's right. He is the power in the incarnadine clouds that rumble across the sky in the evil world. He is the terror and the destruction and the lightning.

And then there is Meon.

Meon cannot possibly be as bad as people say, because if he was, then there would be nothing left for virtue in this world. There wouldn't be any point in anything, in even trying, if Meon were as bad as people say.

And I've never noted him explicitly as doing harm. I've never seen it, never heard of it, never obtained an authoritative documentary reference to any cruel and monstrous thing that he has done. He doesn't even have his own wing of the palace; he isn't part of the government of the evil world. He's just there.

But I've seen him. I've seen a photograph of him. I've seen his smile. So I know why people say what they say. I've seen his smile.

He keeps all the worst things in the world in that smile, behind that smile, like he's holding them all back.

Field Guide! to...

Sa'a Lingurth

This is a gigantic creature with aspects of a blowfish, catfish, eel, manta, and whale. It carries the evil world on its back. It can send its tendrils up through its sewers and into the human world to hook into your soul. It's not 100% clear how this works since the human world is not in the evil world's sewers and the evil world goes down forever. Also, souls are intangible. That said, it happens. The best thing to do if Sa'a Lingurth hooks your soul is to think desperately happy thoughts until the tendril retreats. If you would rather not do this, and are OK with being dragged soul-first into the sewers of the evil world, you should have approximately 20 minutes from the first intimations of its presence to the aforementioned baleful eventuality in which to pack any desired sundries for your trip. Though, you cannot hold me liable if it is 15, instead, or 10!



"Do you love me?" I asked, when our time was done.

Diamanta leaned her head back to look at me. "Is that why you think I come to you?"

"Why do you, then?"

She looked down. "I committed a sin I cannot bear," she said.

"This is my expiation."

—from the Thought-Record of Desecration's-Regal Meon

Like he's holding back all the worst things that could ever happen, *all the time*.

He could be that thing which makes things discordant with themselves and the entire world, the thing that rips and ruins, the thing that is the worst face of every monster in the world. He could be that. He maybe even *might* be that. But for right now, he holds it back.

He holds it back, so maybe he's fighting it. Maybe on some level he's trying to do good. But I don't think that's why.

Meon is the god of defilement; he is the Power of **Desecration**.

And it seems to me that he is leashing himself because it is more pleasant to him that people desecrate themselves, and one another, and their own holy things. It seems to me that he is choosing not to be so very great an evil as he ought to be, as he could be, as people say he is, because he loves how very wicked people are, even without Meon.

But I don't know.

Maybe it's all just an excuse. Maybe he just wants me to see that, wants that written down. Maybe he's secretly good and doesn't want anybody to notice. Maybe he's doing monstrous evil, all the time, and letting people believe we do it to ourselves.

I can't tell you, either way. All I can say is that he can't be *as bad* as his reputation, because that would mean the worthlessness of the world.

I won't *let* it mean that. So he can't be.

And then there's Lord Entropy.

He can't be that either. He can't be even as bad as people say Meon is, either.

But he's close.

Lord Entropy, and his Evil World, is all three of them and more. He is the laughter and the storm. He is the seething sleepless evil. He is the architect of our despair.



Hidden Secrets! of ...

Joktan, Power of Scorn

Sometimes the impression arises that Joktan is laughing at Lord Entropy. He is laughing because there is something that Lord Entropy wants that he cannot have, or something that Lord Entropy has failed at or some agony Lord Entropy cannot avoid. When this impression arises, Joktan has unpleasant days.

OGRES

Lord Entropy created the ogres 850 years ago. He molded them from dead trees, rocks and corpses. He made them tall. He made them broad. He made them ridiculously strong and able to smell you from miles away. But the secret of their making is that he started not with anything physical but with a *sensation*: ogres began with the ripping and tearing of flesh. They are more than anything else creatures of *what-it-feels-like* to have your body treated as meat, to have its structure pulled apart by ogres, to be *torn*.

That is what they are and they tell you what manner of being Lord Entropy is.

They were created in Lord Entropy's Chancel and they have only ever known evil. Most of them are innocents in that sense—they have never had call to question or think about their nature, they have never had a reason to understand how terrible they are.

They could be redeemed, but redeeming them would be no kindness, for an ogre is not an ogre if it does not hunger to rip and break the living flesh.

Their leader is Hugh Rosewood.

He's a man who's somehow managed to stay an ogre and yet grow up. He's an ogg gone all *sophisticate*. Maybe he's worked out some kind of moral theory of ogreness. Maybe he's just too impressed by Lord Entropy to really care about the gaping moral issues in his work. He's an *adult*, he understands what it means to be a person in the world,

But he basically doesn't care.

Ogre adults are like that. They're terrifying. They're usually still evil and always almost impossible to stop. But hardly any ogres make it that far. They're born as children and they die as adolescents, by the standards of their race. Even the older ones don't really grow up, not while living in the evil world. Maybe fifteen or sixteen in history, and five or six alive right now, have ever managed to *mature* properly and become like Hugh; and if any have made it past that, all the way to *old*, I hope I never know.

Ogre Bonds and Afflictions

Bond (5): I am strong enough to overpower you.

Bond (2): I can smell you wherever you hide.

Bond (2): I serve and love Lord Entropy.

Affliction (2): I reek; an alarming, distinctive smell.

Affliction (1): I have only ever known evil.

Affliction (1): I am a great, tall beast-like person.

Miscellaneous Ogre Traits

Ogres have the Aspect Trait at level 0-1, with 3 AMP. They have the Paramount Strength Gift and the Paramount Sense Gift: they can use difficulty 4 Aspect miracles of raw strength and power, and difficulty 4 Aspect miracles of smelling things out, for free.

Adult ogres such as Hugh Rosewood also have the Durant, Elusive, and Eternal Gifts; the ancients are reputed to have Immortal.



The common ogre (homo pervalidus) loves music. When the ogres march, others can hear their "walking song" from miles away:

It does no good to see us come.
The world's too small for you to fly.
Keen eyes won't save you from our kind,
We'll pop them out and leave you blind!

Matters none how fast you run.
The world's too small for you to fly.
Quick feet you have but all the same
We'll bite them off and leave you lame!

The last line of each verse is roared with great gusto and merriment. The song continues in the same vein for about thirty verses, and then repeats.

—from A MEDIEVAL BESTIARY, by Paul McArthur

NIMBLEJACKS

The nimblejacks were stolen. They used to belong to the Fallen Angel Achaia.

She's dead.

They're not.

They're the descendants of Hell and corruption lives in them. They're horrid little monsters, almost by definition, cruel and relentless by character. They used to be a kind of incarnation of *consequence*, part of the karma and morality that got cut off from the Ordinary World. They were what you got when you found you were in too deep.

And that's still the livid essence that twists inside them.

Lord Entropy's been breeding them with each other and with humans for millennia. He's kept them cut off from the ordinary world and from the Hell that was their home. Now they're more physical creatures than karmic ones. Now they're gargoyle-imps, humanoid creatures wearing skin as tough as a stone and with nails like spikes of granite. Now they're shriveled things that can move faster than the lightning.



THOUGHT-RECORD TECHNOLOGY

If you wear a thought-record transmitter, you can send your thoughts to its matching teletype receiver from anywhere in the world. Using a receiver in tandem with a computer you can create a transcription of received thoughts in real time, at leisure, or even post-mortem. There is an Estate for Thought-Record Technology, and someone could theoretically invent it in the prosaic world at any time; for now, though, the technology only exists in relatively advanced Chancels. There is a rumor that Lord Entropy can collect the last several days of thought from a dead mortal or Power, regardless of whether they wore a transmitter or willingly broadcast their thoughts while alive; from such ostensible records, made public, have many of this book's quotations come.

They're not consequences, not any more. But they're still fatal. They can still bewitch you so that you can't let go of the promises you've made to them, that you feel you *have to* fulfill whatever agreements with them you make. They can take your word and make it your obsession. Or they can rip your guts out with their fingernails and let you die upon the floor, whatever.

They're living creatures now, and not just bits of Hell, but they still must live their lives in a state of evil, in a world defined by corruption and suffering. It's the weirdest and most wonderful and most terrible thing. If a nimblejack ascends, if they let themselves ascend, if they let their soul look up inside them and appreciate beauty or love or justice, they explode and a fire surges out from where their heart would be and sears through the sky towards Heaven.

THE ISLAND, AND BELOW

The Island of Lord Entropy is a thing of layers; it is built on top of elder and elder ruins, and whether all of these things are of his making, or whether some predate him, we do not know. In the sewers are great Grecian temples, miles in length and sixty feet in height; and the remnants of former cities; and gardens of strange beasts and horrors. Deeper and deeper one may descend, through ever-stranger secrets and forgotten places, into the crushing dark.

Generic tells me that at the end of it all, one sees Lord Entropy again—that in the uttermost depths of the island, one finds oneself crawling on Entropy's body like one were an insect, that the walls fade away and the darkness remains and there is only the hundred-story shape of Lord Entropy in the dark. It could be true. It could be a lie. Generic Dace is not always reliable.

Nimblejack Bonds and Afflictions

Bond (4): You have brought this on yourself.

Bond (2): I am fast enough to catch you.

Bond (2): I serve Lord Entropy.

Affliction (4): If I give myself over to beauty, love, or justice, I will die.

Affliction (1): I am ugly, twisted, and small.

Miscellaneous Nimblejack Traits

Nimblejacks have the Aspect Trait at level 0-3, with 3 AMP. They have Persona 1 applying to the imaginary Estate, Trapped into Evil, with 3 PMP.

They have the Lightning Quickness Gift; this allows them to use difficulty 7 Aspect miracles of moving quickly for 0 MP.



In the late Middle Ages, a practice arose among devil-worshipping cults to run each batch of initiates from one end of a long hall to the other. The last or last few to reach the far end were swallowed by Hell, as the price the cult paid for its powers, and made into "Nimblejacks" (a kind of imp.) These shrunken, shriveled, ugly, and malicious beings were the primary negotiators for Hell, exchanging mortal assistance—money, the sexual favors of a desired human, or magical power—for 'favors'. These favors were usually redeemed in as degrading and corrupt a manner as possible: priests were forced to eat the dead buried in the Churchyard, noblewomen were forced to sleep with their own children, and peasants, who could not be degraded any further, were twisted and reshaped into monsters (including werewolves, vampires, and sometimes even nimblejacks).

On occasion, someone would find the will to strike out at the nimblejack rather than accepting the proffered favor. The nimblejack would then flee as fast as the wind. These humans were perhaps the most unfortunate of them all; rather than simply killing them, the nimblejack would do its best thereafter to make their life a living Hell.

—from A MEDIEVAL BESTIARY, by Paul McArthur

THE DOMICELLI

The humans that serve Lord Entropy are trained to hunt. Underneath the palace of Lord Entropy is a savage garden wherein they find their meat; they descend, and fight with elder horrors, and bring up monstrous things to be their food.⁹

They are often put to employing this training in our non-evil world.

They are feral creatures, though they can be mannerly. They are not comfortable in civilization. They are not comfortable in non-evil worlds. The stench of things not being dominated by desecration, destruction, and scorn disturbs them. They feel disoriented, like people breathing ether, and out of place. But they are still very good at hiding in our world, at renting apartments and walking on streets and otherwise infiltrating us that they may watch us, or steal from us, or help Lord Entropy's greater servants on their hunts.

The humans of Lord Entropy are also called **Domicelli** (domicellus, domicella); this term is strictly applied to those who earn his favor, and loosely to any human whose loyalty lies with the Darkest Lord.

⁹ The history of the *Nobilis* as I have been taught it allows no room for elder horrors; it is a peculiarity of Lord Entropy's Chancel that when you are within it there appear to be entities and civilizations that are remnants of things long predating Man. Presumably they were created with just such properties, even as the fossils of the ordinary world.

PROPERTIES OF THE EVIL WORLD

- We want what we cannot have.
- We are prey to false impressions.
- The truth is darker than you know.
- Joktan laughs at you.
- Nothing lasts forever.
- The worst is yet to come.

He stood at the edge of the Earth and drank the world.

"As a servant of Creation," I said, "I should kill you."

He could not move. He had too much raw power pouring into him. His eyes were edgy and frightened.

"Hell," I said. "I will kill you. But I admire your appetite."

—from the Thought-Record of Hugh Rosewood

There are two dominating conditions of the Evil World.

The first is *the arising impression*.

Judgments, perceptions, appearances arise as if they were objective facts. They breathe forth from the world. You will be standing in the Evil World, and you will realize: *the moon seems to hate the stars*. These thoughts are the art of Lord Entropy, impressions painted on the world. You may seem guilty; a grotto may seem safe; a thing may seem terrible, or virtuous or bright. Qualia form a mist.

The second dominating condition is hunger.

To live in the Evil World is to know a desperate, fierce hunger. It grows the longer you stay; for those who live there, it has sunk into the bone and flesh of them, made a permanent change. There is a substance and a quality of need, and there is nothing that lives there or stays there terribly long that is not driven into danger, folly, or madness—and often more than one of these—by a hunger for a thing it cannot find, or cannot have, or cannot permit itself to possess. Even for the ogres, whose tastes are awful but simple enough, the hunger has no end; the more they gorge themselves on human flesh, the hungrier they become.

Get the Deets! on...

Meon, Power of Desecration

Sometimes it seems that the thing Meon holds back behind his smile—the thing he is struggling so desperately to keep inside him, to keep from leaking out into the world—is the realization of Lord Entropy's dreams and desires. Sometimes it seems he is not so much Lord Entropy's Power as his jailor.

When it most seems like that is so, Meon has unpleasant days in turn.

Field Guide! to ...

Baalhermon, Power of Destruction

Only Baalhermon is never the target of the cruelty of Lord Entropy, but if he is never tormented, he is still ill-used. Often there is no Baalhermon in him, no personhood at all, but only a puppet used by his master's will, a shell through which Lord Entropy wreaks destruction on the world.

THE BORDER MYTHIC

This is the reality behind the dream that is our world.

In an endless emptiness there is a single cup of fire. The flames of it are blue.

There is no scale to it.

There can be no scale to it. There are no referents. The texture of the void is impermeable to the idea of measurement. The stars are unreachable and incomparable above.

It is larger than the universe and it is smaller than a pebble in your shoe.

Let it be large, then. Let it be larger than worlds. See the cup as a flaring, staggering enormity; inside it, the tree of worlds. Its roots writhe in the flames, pierce them, sink into the void. At that base, where Nothingness and Burning meet, is Hell. At its crown is the Blessed Land of Heaven. In between them, dangling from the branches of the World Ash, worlds: billions of them. Uncounted, unmeasured billions of worlds.

Most of them are flat.

Around the cup of fire and around the Ash and around its worlds the Excrucians swarm like gnats. They are an endless army in an endless space, but right now their efforts are focused on a handful of battle fronts. They raid against Heaven, and Hell, and Jotunheim where live the giants, and Aelfscienne of the elves, and Dionyl, and Abaton, and here and there and other places. And the Earth.

Thirty fronts, perhaps, in all.

Zoom in.

Our world is *there*, an island in the leaves, a great flat plane anchored in subtle ways and great ones to the Ash. It is green and brown and blue and wet, and over its edges cascade an endless falling sea. Mariners would be better served not to sail too near the edge of that expanse.

This world—our world—is fundamentally *alive*.

Sometimes I will call it the Border Mythic. Other times I will call it the Mythic World.

It is our secret reality where everything lives and moves.

The wind is alive, in the Mythic World. The forests, and each tree. The mountains have their shoulders and their heads, their faces, their conversations and their thoughts. Each beam of sunlight. Each rock. Each thing that is, is possessed of its own spirit, from the smallest to the largest; it takes only the pressure of *attention* to differentiate and speak to the will of the smallest part.

Cars drive by their own will. Birds and aeroplanes make choices as they soar. There is nothing that coin loves better than its circulation, and nothing that joys a wave so much as its death upon the shore.

It is a world bathed in the golden light of life.

It is rich in purposes and feelings.

To see it is to know that everything's OK, even though it's not.

THE BORDER MYTHIC

To see the Border Mythic you just have to let go of the scientific world. It's as hard as spitting out iron nails when you haven't even put them in your mouth yet, the first time, but after that it's more like falling asleep in the back of a car. Sometimes you'll even just snap over to the mythic when you see something impossible happen, because that impossible thing primes your brain to the reality of the magic that's going on all around you.

Getting *back* into the shelter of the ordinary world—that's harder.

It takes me about four hours of hard work to get back to reality every time. That's after an awful lot of practice. When I started, it took me all weekend, and I got brain cramps and messed up my body rhythms something fierce. *Æobilis* can usually do it just like *that*, but sometimes even they have trouble!

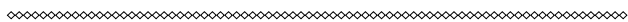
THE CLEAVE OF THE BOTANISTS

The Cleave of the Botanists are alchemists. They struggle to unlock the magic of flowers—the inner magic in each flower put there by the power of Heaven. Like the magicians of old, they can use this power to speak to the dead, turn bullets away from their skin, command the elements and fly.

I once asked my car why it put up with me. "You so obediently take me where I want to go," I said. "You follow my every order. Why should this be so? You are your own person!"

It considered that. "I suppose," it said, "that I consider it basic human maintenance. One goes through a kind of daily hassle, you know, taking humans to one place or another, in order to get the best fueling, sheltering, and cleaning performance out of them."

—from THE DIARY OF EDMUND FINCH, by Jackie Robinson



Time in the Mythic World is strange, and prone to turn about.

Alchemist Traits

Alchemists control various wondrous treasures, represented by the Treasure Trait at level 0-2, the ability to have Treasure MP (although they start with 0), and limited access to miraculous Bonds and Afflictions. Their Treasure Trait is weaker than a Power's—they cannot control ordinary things or wield their powers across great distances unless some specific quality of their magic allows.

FORBIDDEN THINGS

The earth splits and clear, sparkling water boils up—these are the *Chalices of Conception*. A female who is unable otherwise to conceive may immerse herself therein and draw in its power, making her either parthenogenetic or fertile with a male she loves; but the child will be infused unnaturally with the power of the world.

The milk of forgotten faith is a forbidden substance that is palliative to even the most guilty conscience. To drink it is to fall into a haze where one is true to all devotion and devoted to all things.

Through a Power clinging to unworthy ambitions or self-justifying delusions, the Cursed Dominions known as "the courts of the wind" may form. A cleared-out space becomes possessed by twisted spirits of the wind. These spirits drag or push mortals or even Powers into the court and form a wall around them; a peculiar trial then begins.

The crimes of which the court accuses its victims vary. In most cases, it challenges them not on their deeds but on their qualities as people—do they adhere to their duty? Are they generous? Are they courageous? Do they serve those who depend on them in the fashion that they must? The judges form as faces in the air: they interrogate the accused, they question these moral traits.

Those who prove lacking are flung from a cliff.

It would all be an example of karma in action, and not so much a Cursed Dominion, save that in the courts of the wind, true testimony may not be given. It does not leave the mouth: it dies in the air, unspoken or at least unheard. One may freely argue subjective beliefs, technicalities, vagaries, and lies, and one may speak truth on unrelated matters, but a true justification of one's duty, service, generosity, or valor is not presentable in this court.

PROPERTIES OF THE BORDER MYTHIC

- Its locations are absolute;
- Its stories are mythic;
- Its particulars have free will;
- Karma and dharma exert real but finite force;
- Roads may be found;
- Focused attention differentiates a thing from its environment.

HOW IT ALL WORKS

Things mostly happen the same way no matter which world you're looking at. For example, when the snow *anguli* jump off their clouds and flurry down on the world below, then in the real world, it starts snowing. Or when something irritates a volcano into erupting spirit, it erupts.

This would be really shocking if it happened by accident, you understand, but really, it's the *point*.

THE BIGGER SPIRITS

The greatest things in the mythic world have Imperators rather than spirits.

The sun, for instance.

She's not a sun spirit, she's an Angel. Sometimes the sun is her mansion and sometimes it is her face; sometimes there is a *thing* that is different from *her*. But the spirit of the sun is an angel.

The same is true of the moon, the great mountain ranges, the seasons, and the seas.

Then there's the Ogdoad, the class of "really important spirits who aren't Imperators themselves." Spirits like, say, Old Man Influenza. A Power might be able to beat him up, but that won't get the Power his respect; if you want Old Man Influenza's help, you'd better show him honor and courtesy and be aware of just how old and powerful he is.

Lady Midsummer Night is another spirit of the Ogdoad. She's a mystery, even to her friends, but if you're kind and decent to her she'll be kind to you.

ATTENTION. THOUGHT.

How is it that you can meet Lady Jill Erosion, walking in the woods, when the woods should be just one big mess of spirits intertwined with one another?

It's like this:

It's the power of attention. Introspection. Thought.

Most spirits just kind of drift through life. There's a dryad in every tree, but it's practically asleep, and even when it's awake it chats with the other dryads and the wind, it doesn't talk to *you*.

But if you *see* a thing, or *hear* a thing, if you *bear witness to it* or if it bears witness to you, then the spirit of that thing differentiates from the larger context. Its voice and face will surface from the fabric of the world.

That's how I met the Jack of Roads down by Tiger Mountain, long before I met Ianthe.

I was lost.

Mizija the wind is part of larger weather systems, but she has her own identity.



There are palaces in our dreams, you know. Sometimes someone finds and keeps one, and it stays around even after we've come awake.

And I could see the forms of dryads, basking in the sun and the faces in the dirt, but they wouldn't talk to me. And I could hear the woodpecker boy hammering at the trees, but it wasn't any of them that I really longed for. It wasn't any of them that my heart called forth.

It was him, who came wandering up along the way, and whistling as he went: the great-great-grandson of the Emperor of Roads, and the son of Tiger Mountain: the Jack of Roads himself.

If you look close enough, you can see the least spirits—the *anguli* and *minime*—of individual pebbles, pine needles, snowflakes, and clumps of dirt.

THE WEIRDING WALL, AND BEYOND

The cup of flame that surrounds the world is named the Weirding Wall. It has only seven entrances large enough to allow a large Riding of Excrucians in, but numerous holes permeable to smaller hosts of the enemy.

What about beyond it? To a person of Creation, everything outside the world is essentially a barren, empty void. The longer you stare at it, trying to see details, the more you see the inside of your eyes.

Look, for example, upon the austere landscape of Sisera Sanguinary—ah! To an Excrucian, or a grangler, or any other creature of the void, this place brings awe. But what of the neighboring Stringent Heights?

Vulgar and unimpressive, say the granglers—

But our eyes see only darkness;

But our body feels only the faint warm gentle pressure of the Not;

But our ears hear only silence, in Sisera and the Stringent Heights alike.



PROPERTIES OF THE LANDS BEYOND CREATION

- ❖ They are not real;
- ❖ Their particulars defy explanation;
- ❖ They extend to eternity;
- ❖ They contain nothingness;
- ❖ They reflect your ideas of them;
- ❖ They reflect you;
- ❖ They are a thing in which phenomena arise.



In the Mythic World you can get practically anywhere by road.
There is a path to death, and back. There's a road up to the sun.

YOUR CHANCEL

If you override the elevator in the Eastman Insurance building, it will take you to Camelot—the marvelous Summer Kingdom in the sky. Founded in honor of the chivalric vision, it's a sweeping landscape in the clouds full of knights, honor, chivalry, tragedy, duels, monsters, castles and fair maidens. The Powers of Camelot are its Kings and Queens, celebrated in contests of honor and courtly love; only the wicked “King” Lot and his black knights defy them, and Lot is defeated and slain each year on midwinter's eve to refresh the lifespan of the sun.

Locus Zaananim is home to the characters and worlds of network television. The zones of currently airing programs are sealed in the Zaan Biospheres to minimize cross-pollination, while worthy characters and elements from cancelled programs are allowed into the Great Walled City of the Chancel proper. This City, roughly the size of Canada, is a sectioned labyrinth that divides into drama, comedy, and genre “quarters,” with the last disproportionately sized to allow starships, cattle herds, and pirate ships adequate space to roam. The unruly—those who refuse to accept the broader world of the Chancel, or their own series' cancellation—are driven outside the far walls into the outer darkness, where they merge together into monstrous tellipedes, characmeras, and comedy blobs. It is the duty of the Power Tiria to keep them out when they grow strong enough to threaten the walls, while it is the job of her brother caelestis Foramin Blake to dissect them when a merged character is unexpectedly needed for a sequel or remake.

There is no land route into Locus Zaananim. You enter and exit via plot holes or with a special appeal to one of the Powers of the place.

Locus Casluhim is a secret mountain in the Los Angeles hills. Its design is in the Olympian mold, with spots of airy Grecian architecture scattered along the slope and shepherds (herding sheep or cloud dragons), fire nymphs, and musicians wandering the peaks. A number of small villages cluster around the mountain's base, with intermittent access at best to the greater Los Angeles area around them.

Get the Deets! on...

Locus Qamamir

If you are a competent mortal athlete, Texcoyo may invite you to the games at Locus Qamamir. This is an opportunity worth seizing; the Chancel has a profoundly invigorating effect that will stay with you for many years. Do not, however, accept his “side bet,” where the winner may devour or sacrifice the loser's heart; eating Texcoyo's heart would make you a Power, but there is no one who may stand against him at these games in the entire world.



The beasts of Locus Thegri come out at night with a positive hunger for money. They will gladly kill a passing traveler to shake out her purse with their teeth and gulp down the coins, bills, and credit cards therein.

—from *A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO CREATION*, by *Jasprite Sherrard*

There are walking paths into Locus Casluhim but the simplest way to find it is to spot a cloud dragon wandering the skies anywhere within three hundred miles of the place. Stare at the cloud dragon until it realizes it has been caught; recognizing you either as a knowledgeable traveler or a dangerously perspicacious mundane, it will paralyze you with a glance, runnel down from the clouds it plays in, and carry you off to the Chancel's slope.

Clegyr is a living Chancel whose flesh is rock and whose excreta are gems. It swims in the Earth's crust like a fish swims in water; the temple-city of its resident Powers, on Clegyr's back, moves through stone with equal ease. The human residents were made over into stone-bodied “gnomes” when the place became a Chancel. Their duty is to provide for the Powers' needs and to arrange the gems that Clegyr leaves behind in patterns that make the angels glad. It's not clear how well this works, but if you find a gem while mining that appears to be the poo of a giant rock-fish-Chancel, please consider leaving it in place and moving on.

One of the apartment buildings on 43rd Street probably belongs to Mary Shenk.

Which 43rd Street?

It doesn't really matter. They're all the same. Every 43rd Street, in every city. They run together, and somewhere on it, there's the home of Mary Shenk.

You can use that knowledge to get from city to city. From continent to continent, even, if you do it right.

Just don't forget to leave a tip, when you do, for Mary Shenk.

Every Familia of Powers has one: a Chancel, pulled from the world around it. A secret world with hidden entrances and exits and rules that are all its own.

What would *yours* be like?

HEAVEN

Heaven Intrudes

It is not by our own will that grace comes into our world. It is unasked for. It is unbidden. It is not in *response* to anything. It's too wild, pure, and mad for that.

Grace invades.

The angels are an occupying army in our world. They are light that bursts upon us in our darkness, lifting up what we would rather abandon to its misery. They are the flowers of Heaven, blooming where the world had forsaken life—on the scrapheaps of metal, in the slick sickness of spreading oil, on the graves of sinners and the just, twining up our skyscrapers and our tenements and our office buildings in defiance of the soullessness of our lives. They are the enlightenment that bursts in on us when we were just trying to be small little men and women, eating our bagels and drinking our Starbucks, tilling our little patches of soil, dying in our heaps and grottoes, or staring out at the world from our high towers. We didn't ask for it. We didn't even understand that it could happen. It was like a Zen master suddenly hitting us with a stick while we were just in line to pay the telly bill.

Heaven is the angel that catches us as we fall; not because we needed it, not because we wanted it, not even because we'd dreamed of angels since we were a child but because the angels decided the world was better if we lived.

Heaven invades, but at least it invades us as a holy thing.

The angels take beauty as a sacred trust. It's their Craft and their Great Working, it's what they *build*. Having found themselves born into the brightest land in all the lands there are, they decided they *would* make everything else as bright. Their own kin—lovers, friends, ancient acquaintances and enemies—are suffering in Hell, twisting and corroding into monsters, and still they speak of justice and righteousness in the world. Their blood is the favored stain on Excrucian blades; of all the creatures of the Ash, they alone may never escape the constant press of the War, may never anticipate a week, month, year, when nothing of theirs is threatened by the gods of emptiness;

PROPERTIES OF HEAVEN

- Its beauty transforms.
- Its beauty demands service.
- It is alive, a growing thing.
- Its grace is given, not taken.
- Its grace is given, not earned.
- Its touch makes things more like itself.
- It is absolute.



Now in his youth, on a sweltering summer day, Devin felt suddenly as gold; his limbs were strong, his thoughts were clear, and his heart was treasure.

He sipped deeply of his lemonade; his spirit shouted in his frame; his dreams were suddenly within his reach.

Then the moment passed away to an ordinary summer.

Events arose. Circumstances transpired. Grievs and loves and hurts ensued. The matter was forgotten.

Now, as he stared into the burning heart of the void—into the squirming, howling, flat-eared dog-god emptiness that was an uncreated world—he saw a pattern that reminded him of that gold.

Heedless of the open-throated forces that writhed and bayed within, he reached in his hand; trailed it along the surface to make it separate and recombine like some baleful gelatin; grasped firmly at the tail of a strange anomaly, and pulled it into sight.

There! There, of all things, there and then, in the containment chamber that he'd made, there lay the summer day; therein lay the gold; skulking, lurking, snarling, forbidden on the surface of the void.

"It is the end of days," Devin advised it, for it was, and then he smiled. "I'd wondered where you'd been."

—from DREAMS OF EMPTINESS, by Emily Chen

and still they labor to better *us*. They take the time to bring grace to where it is most efficaciously transformative, to will the betterment of the world and of our lives and our places and our existence, effulgent unasked, undreamt-of and invasive grace.

They will make this world a Heaven. They expect no less of us.

The wildflowers of Heaven rip through the substrate of the world to bloom in impossible places. They are hard on the cruelty of the world; they make it hard to be petty, hard to be small, hard to be *human* in their presence, much less genuinely wicked. They make your own soul and dharma writhe within you if you ignore the power of their witnessing.

And they will give you strength, if you let them.



Oscar opened the Mystery, found at once he did not understand it, and spent the rest of the day in deep contemplation of whether he had accidentally participated in a koan.

—from A NOBLE'S CATECHISM, by K.C. Danine

The angels forbid Heaven to even the most beautiful of human souls. "Go back," they say, "and make your own world better."

If you are willing to let them transform you. If you will take the strength they offer you, at the cost of giving up your weakness; if you will take the chance to become a hero, at the cost of no longer being normal; if you are willing to be *better*, at the cost of never again being what you were—they will make you something more.

They will make you purer. They will make you cleaner. They will find the thing inside you that you ought to be and clean away the detritus of the self. They will energize you, brighten you, make it impossible for you to hide from the beauty of your soul, but wrack you with it, rather, possess you of it, make you burn with the awesome amazing thing that is a person, that is *you*, a child of the Heaven—they-will-make, in the perfection of this world.

They are flowers that take from you the power to compromise with wickedness and mediocrity, to be comfortable with evil and others' suffering, in exchange for renewed life.

Some of them preserve their strength in extractions. Some of them you can crush, distill, mix, turn into medicine or poultices, and they'll still be able to work. They'll be cures for depression, sickness, misfortune, or hopelessness. They can regrow limbs. They can give you back whatever else it is you may have lost. And even the ones that aren't proper medicines can have effects almost as great if you happen upon them in their strange beds and bushes scattered across the world.

And maybe it's because they don't fit in the ordinary world that hardly anybody knows about them. Maybe it's because the ordinary world teaches us that the flowers that we find in such places—growing on the sides of buildings, twining among our bedsheets, growing along the luggage rack of the metro and from and out of and into the mirrors in the dirty ladies' room down by the station—that they don't exist. And certainly, if they did exist, they wouldn't make things *better*.

But I don't think that's really why.

Medicine's not impossible, after all. It's not like a fairy or a hydra. It's not a thing that *breaks* our world. We could be living in a world where everybody knows about the panacea, where you get bottles of it at the drug store, where it's just \$19.99 to cure what ails you—and it wouldn't break the Earth. It doesn't fit into the ordinary world, sure, but it *could* have. So that's not why we do not know.

We don't hear about this because it costs too much to become an agent of Heaven. We don't hear about it because people want to be small.

If we weren't like that we would die.

If we didn't mostly flinch from Heaven we'd be *dead*. There wouldn't be anybody left.

What hope would *we* have, as heroes, in a world where even Angels die?

Humankind never fell from grace. No cherub bars the gates of Eden. This is still a perfect world.

—from THE DIARY OF EDMUND FINCH, by Jackie Robinson



Killing God was wrong, of course, reflected the Excrucian; but a handful of flowers and a few sincere condolences should reasonably settle the matter, after all.

—from VOID STORIES, compiled by Édouard Guy

Sometimes the light of Heaven will break the darkness of our lives.

Sometimes you'll be falling and the lotus will catch you—you'll be on the great wide bloom of it, the magic-carpet-expanse of it, and you'll realize you're blowing in the wind instead of dying of having nothing to cling to. Sometimes you will be lost, and the light of Heaven will give unto you a path. Or a hope. Or, at least, a chance.

You must ask yourself if you are worthy of it.

If you are not then you are better served to step off the edge of the lotus and resume your fall. You are better served to walk forth from that light. If you are not capable of earning Heaven's grace then you must not accept it. It hurts to say this, because I do not believe that it is right; but it is true. It is the will of the angels, always, to be just.

Sometimes it is a justice mixed with kindness or with poetry. Sometimes it is justice in pettier or more juridical forms. Sometimes it is a justice as cruel and hard as a diamond is cruel and hard. The angels don't have a preference, not in that sense. They're too big for such small distinctions. They don't care about *human* justice.

But they seek always to be just.

The Devils thought otherwise. They thought that there should be a place in the world for the nasty, for the ugly, for the monsters and the cruel. They thought that justice didn't mean Heaven could do whatever it wanted to the mean and foul things. For that crime, for the crime of *standing up for* Caligula, Pol Pot, and the ichneumon wasp, the angels cast them into Hell.

So you must not imagine—if you are not such a being as could earn the grace of Heaven—that you may accept that grace unscathed. The price of grace for any evil being—for any of us, really, who are less than perfect—is justice. For some the cost of that justice, even in the face of Heaven's light, will be more than you can bear.



"Two days ago," Mieszko said, "I could not have seriously considered selling myself to Hell. You are very good at this, Nilaia."

"Perfection is in an angel's nature," Nilaia answered.

Mieszko frowned. "Then how did you fall?"

"With great difficulty," Nilaia admitted. "I must struggle constantly lest I return to grace."

—from CHILDREN OF HEAVEN, by Martin Elliott

Flowers grow in the eyes of a human too thoroughly graced by Heaven, and their body becomes light.

There's one street in New York that needed no angels to make it beautiful.

There's graffiti on the walls, of course, and weeds on the sidewalk. There's a dead dog off to the way. Some windows are broken. These things do not detract from the beauty.

They're part of it. These elements, individually ugly, arrange in a way that captures all the beauty in the world.

No one walks that street. No one would dare.

—from *BOILERMAKER'S DAUGHTER*, by Emily Chen

But if you have enough soul within you to hold that grace, and bear that justice, then you may take up the burden of salvation. If you are better, on the whole, than you might have been, then you should accept all Heaven's gifts. They will heal you, in measure to your worth, and hurt you, in measure to your sins; and if they wind up hurting you too much, but not to your destruction, then you may go to Surolam, and the peace of the Locust Court and the pain of knowing Heaven eventually will pass.

HELL

Hell Awaits

Hell is always with you.

You won't realize that until you're looking back—until you're in a dark and empty time, a hurting time, a ruined and compromised time in your life. You won't realize it until you understand one day that you've failed, that you've wasted yourself and your opportunities. Then you'll look back and you'll see that Hell was always there.

It was with you when you made excuses.

It was with you when you didn't bother to care.

In your self-righteousness and your laziness and your willful stupidity; in your casualness with the things you cared about, in your willingness to give up your own good fortunes in order to hurt somebody else; in your pettiness, in your rushes to judgment, in every mistake you regret and will always regret.

God wasn't with you, then, if He even exists. Cneph, the closest thing to God we have evidence of, the will that made the Ash and flame from nothingness—he wasn't with you. Not Heaven. Not the Wild, not the Light, not even, probably, the Dark.

In those times when you were petty and small and twisted only Hell was there.

Hell is what loves you even when you're wrong.

Hell is what loves us even when we're bad.

And it's fire and brimstone and poison and rotting things, too. It's a punishment ground and torment-realm at the base and bottom of the Ash. It's corrupting the Fallen Angels, turning them into monsters, and the human souls that wind up there aren't any too well off themselves. But that isn't the core of it. That isn't the heart of it. It's just the price we pay to have something like Hell in the world at all.

This is the Hell of Shuffling in Chains.

We are embedded in foul mist and we shuffle in chains and all around is a flat white labyrinth whose paths we do not know. One day we shall reach the end of it, perhaps—

So saith the theory of finite and infinite things—

And then we shall rise, purified, to Earth or Heaven or some other sort of Hell.

That is what is; that is what has been.

Save that unto us, here, in the Hell of Shuffling in Chains, has been sent a savior. She wears striped stockings and has a gamine face and when she crouches on two knees and one hand her back has a beetle's curve. She carries a sack and she is chained, like us—like us, but she does not shuffle. Instead, she perches on the walls; laughs delightedly at the misty hopelessness around her; and jumps, great long-legged jumps, from height to height.

Often, she falls.

She laughs then, too.

Where did she come from? Where is she going? She does not tell us these things, only that she is passing through.

But she has freed us.

We didn't think we were worthy of salvation.

Any of us could have learned her strategy—could have faced the risks and possibilities and climbed atop the walls.

But she is the one who freed us. We could not have imagined it.

We did not think that we were worthy of salvation.

"That way!" she shouts. "I see the exit!"

It is because she has come THROUGH that I am lingering to mark the path; and I am thinking, perhaps, I will wear such stockings as hers, one day, in some other Hell, and do the same.

—from *DOORKNOBS*, by Emily Chen

Hell means that there is always something with you, even if sometimes it is horrible.

We are never without our witnesses; never without something to look upon us, and give honor to our suffering and our mistakes. We may tumble to the bottom of the Ash, forsaken of and by all other things, and still we will exist, and still we will not fall into the Not, because there is a Hell.

You may take that as a comfort or a horror.

The substances of Hell are things that consume and hold the attention. They are things that surround you wholly.

They're dirty, awful things. That's just the gateway though. They're not evil so much as awful. They're ritually impure. They're not clean.

They are the rotten flowerbeds that abused children crawl into to escape the horrors of their lives. Sick sap will cover you, the leaves will drip rot on you, there are bugs and even spiders and a smell like the world-rot around you, but after a while, it's comforting, embracing, surrounding, it covers all the senses and there's nothing but the black and red and smell and strangeness.

It was lust that brought the angel Domiel down; it could have been nothing else. Once, his relationship with Raphi had been— not love, never love, but a partnership. But Raphi had fallen and there could be no partnership now; no twining of souls. It was lust, when he met with Raphi in the Aconion Wood. They did not see the Excrucian that waited in the woods. And when Domiel, in his passion, abandoned his place in Heaven and vowed himself to the Code of Hell, they did not see the Excrucian take their lust into his hands and weave a scythe from its essence.

With the creation of that scythe, named Hurlali but called Indiscretion, the Aconion Wood cried out in pain; and Domiel with release; and the angel that guards those woods moved like a storm. He slew the Excrucian with one blow, so that we shall never know its name; but he could not hold the scythe. It fell from his hands and sank through the forest floor.

—from LEGENDS OF THE NOBILIS, by Luc Ginneis

They're the fires that screwed-up people like to stick their hands in. It burns you, it hurts, it's awful, but it takes you away from yourself. It makes your whole world about, are you really going to do this? Are you really doing this? Did you really just do that? People think that burning in a hellfire is about being strong, or hurting, or something like that, they tell themselves all kinds of stories about why they do it, but the DSM-IV tells us, and I agree, that it's to break the world you're living in and just be in the fire for a little while.

Hell-things are the thing that makes people shoot up, maybe. At least that seems a lot like Hell to me, the way we've made drug users ritually impure like butchers in India. The way drug life is viscerally unclean yet draws people back and back again, the way it takes people away from themselves. It's obvious that there's some Hell in the nasty drugs people make from Hell's rotting flowers, but I think that there's a bit of Hell in a lot of the ordinary chemical stuff too.

The first time somebody cuts themselves, they've probably been touched by some of the things from Hell.

Maybe even the first time they drink.

Hell is what lets you get away from the world.

PROPERTIES OF HELL

- It fills the mind and senses.
- It is always with you.
- It is with you the most when you do not realize it is there.
- It has no cleanliness to it.
- It hurts.
- It twists you up.
- It sees the worst of you, and can quite possibly see the rest.

Field Guide! to...

Devils

Weep for the Devils, for they have forgotten how to live with what they love. Their wounds do not heal. Cruelty has become a reflex. Half of them do not know how to talk to people without twisting the knives in their target's soul. If you meet one you must tell it, "I do not want to be hurt. I do not want to be hurt. I do not want to be wicked. I want to love the good." You can stop to say other things but you must keep coming back to this. You must keep reminding them that you would rather not be damned. Their compassion is not dead. Their honest love for you, it is not dead. It is simply very easily forgotten.

The work of Hell is holy in this life.

I will say this even though I fear the Devils and even though I fear the flames. I will say this even though I idolize Heaven and its given grace; even though there are times when I am angry, and more than angry, at what Hell has been and done.

But the first work of Hell is to honor and bear witness to the things that would otherwise be entirely unloved.

They will come and sit with you if you have to die alone. The Powers of Hell. The demons. The flames and rotten flowers, at least, if nothing else; maybe even a Devil. They won't do it to hurt you, not even the Devils. They might hurt you, they might hurt you terribly, they might even steal your soul, because they're just that broken. But it won't be why they're there.

They'll be there because if they were not there, you would suffer and die, alone, and with no witnesses; and for someone to die in such a fashion is anathema to Hell.

They will come and visit you, now and then, if you live in the mountains, isolated, with no one else to know.

They will come to watch you, to listen to you, to know you, if you are a thing so horrible and broken that no one else would dare.

They love the evil things, maybe, best of all, because it's evil that needs Hell most. If you want to know how the Devils have gone so horribly wrong, it may be that; *that*, as much as the corruption and their own suffering; that they spend all of their time in the company of the worst of us,

Vincent Guntali did not believe in Hell; nor did he believe that, should such a place exist, he would be exiled there. Perhaps this amused the Prince of Lies, for he struck a bargain with Vincent's soul. Now Vincent sits in a high place overlooking the flames and suffering. So long as he remains unwavering, remains certain that he does not belong in Hell, he shall not suffer from it.

He did well at first, but for the past year, he has dared think nothing else but "I am not in Hell."

—from OBSERVATIONS OF THE DAMNED, by Quan Feng-Ying

“Congratulations,” said Nilaia. “You have corrupted your first soul; you have won a victory for the Fallen. How does it feel?”

“...It hurts,” said Forchas, after a pause.

“Of course it hurts,” Nilaia answered. “It always hurts. It hurts terribly. This is Hell.”

—from CHILDREN OF HEAVEN, by Martin Elliott

and so they’ve come to exemplify that awfulness themselves. But to love the evil things is not their duty but its expression. The work of Hell is to love whatever needs them most; whatever would, without Hell, be alone.

Hell’s eyes are open to you.

They will not turn away.

That is why the humans with the greatest taint of Hell are as likely to walk the road of sainthood as that of evil, or to find a strange equivocating path between them. The thing in us that can love the evil is at once our worst side and our best.

THE WORLD ASH

From the World Ash hang billions of worlds, but scarcely two hundred and forty have been found.

It is like this:

Out on the immensity of the tree, where rivers of wind, and snow, and fire run; where wasps the size of city blocks do fly, and alien birds soar; where the only visible truth is the vast expanse of bark and branch and leaf beneath your feet, there is no simple exploration. What seemed an easy shot when you last saw the Ash from afar—when you stood on a world and sought out other worlds with a telescope, or flew far from the Ash to orient from the sky—becomes an impossible tangle of possible paths, like the most confusing wilderness, when you stand upon its flesh.

Thus, to the Powers, only the worlds named in the *Compendium of Journeys* are yet known; and to Heaven, scarcely more.

If you stand far away—if you fly to the Weirding Wall around the world and look inwards—it will seem to you that over there are worlds that have already fallen to the enemy; worlds that have frayed and withered, or fallen from the tree like rotten fruit. And over there are whole galaxies’ worth of worlds that even the Angels have not found: worlds untouched by the politics of Hell and Heaven and the gloaming passage of the Excrucian Horde, because the paths that lead thence are not known.

Closer in and squinting hard, you may see the paths from Earth to Venus, or to Mars; to the fire on the Ash that is Alpha Centauri; and to the other reachable worlds. And it is easy enough for those who walk the Ash to find their way towards Heaven or towards Hell—to, if they reach not those ultimate immensities, move in their direction.

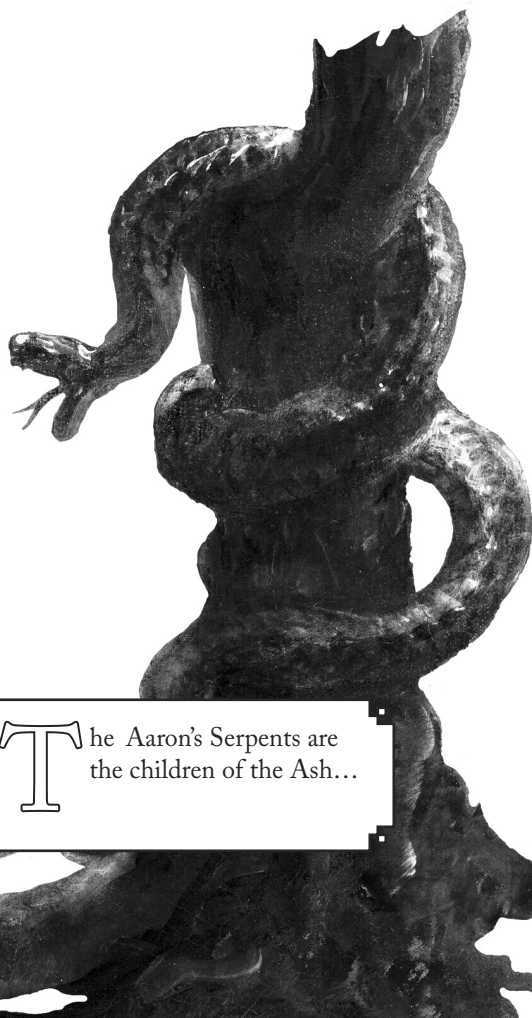
In a nearly infinite Creation, most of the universe is not known.

It must be strange—Ianthe thinks, and I agree—to live on those alien, primeval worlds, where the substance of existence may end without any knowledge of the cause. Where one day there may be *Komm* and *Iax* and the next, *nonetheless*, and with no word in that isolated place of the war that brought that end. Where one day if the Sun is slain by Excrucian hands, the fire that lights their world will die, and they never to know the truth of why, or even really understand what they had lost.

Now there are some—Firstborn of the Angels, one assumes, Attaris Ebröt Appèkà and others—who must have commerce with those worlds. For I cannot see how Firstborn could be Meaning and Existence and yet never know that meaning; to know meaning, and to embody meaning, seem intimately to be bound. And in like fashion do I imagine time—that Attaris, to be Attaris, must touch on the things of every world.

So I imagine. So it may be, for such personages as they. But for the rest of us it is not so.

Not Parasiel in his Chancel; not Genseric Dace, with his armies; not one, that is, of the multitude of great and alien things who exist and cast forth their light and shadows on the world, is given intimate knowledge of every world and the paths thereto save as necessity commands. They illumine and they darken all, but they do not see every manifestation of that shadow and that light.



The Aaron’s Serpents are the children of the Ash...

THE LIGHT AND THE DARK

The Light is that which stands in clouds of radiant glory and looks away from life.

The Light loves you.

The Light knows you.

But the Light will not *see* you. It will not hear you. You are tainted by the gross physicality of life.

It knows you in the perfection of your soul. It knows you in the deep truth of you. It knows things about you that you've never had the chance to live out, nor never will.

It is equations on gematria.

It is a dream of humanity made perfect through good law.

It does not know the tangled mess that life of necessity becomes.

The Dark is the knotted twiggly horror in the gut of the human condition.

It's reckless.

It's cognitive errors and the death-fear. It's carelessness and small-minded negligence. It's the animal that lives in our flesh. It's the fact of having flesh at all.

The Dark is everything that makes us what we oughtn't be.

It's our folly.

It speaks with our own voices.

The Dark will hear you. It'll more than hear you. It'll parrot you back at yourself. Maybe just the parts you say aloud. Maybe the parts you didn't mean to say at all.

The Magisters of the Dark can have grandeur to them, but to tell you the truth, I think that's our own pride. That's the part of us that wants our dark and twisted and grieving side to be something awesome and magisterial, echoing back out. I think if we weren't so proud they would be as monkeys and parrots to us, chattering back in laughter what they've heard us say.

I could be wrong.

Maybe the side of us that walks in emo really *is* that grand.

The Dark loves every human voice. A little outcast girl is as fab to it as a President—maybe more so, since she needs more help to let her heart's voice free. It wants everyone to unleash that voice, you know, to stop holding themselves in, to live free and crazed and wicked as the beasts are wicked and an equal to everybody else.

The Dark will set you free.

She was the wall between death and our house. And death was strong enough to take her

But not to climb that wall.

—on the tombstone of Tang Wen-jiing

Nobiliser FACT:

The Light makes gardens in empty places.



"I will give you this Creation," said Seimelkbe, "and all the power there is in it, if you but give me the cup you hold in your hand."

"This does not tempt me," said Galeid.

—from LEGENDS OF THE NOBILIS, by Luc Ginneis

The Dark's obligations are to humanity, but the Dark may take joy in any voice; thus, the Magisters of the Dark surround themselves with quasi-human things.

The Dark will hold you up as you try to fly, will help you get farther and farther from land, and then it will drop you; for the only thing more beautiful to the Dark than your freedom is your using that freedom to overextend yourself and die. Or, to kill yourself in folly or despair, or to tumble helplessly from the ruined cliff of your own ideas.

The Dark doesn't want anyone to hold you back.

The Dark doesn't want anyone or anything to get in the way of your living.

And the Dark doesn't want anything to kill you in the end but you.

The Dark is the wind and the laughter that follows a falling suicide, down into the dark.

It doesn't really understand you, I guess I should observe. Not any more than the Light does. It's a mad celebration of who you are and your voice and your freedom and your suicide but it's too blinded by the dark to really give any meaning to it all. It's barely even aware of *itself* when it's with you, except inasmuch as you are aware of it. It's listening to the sound of you much more than your specific words.

There're few creatures in all Creation less capable of grasping that something you are trying to tell them is genuinely *important* than the Dark.

But that's okay, the Dark will say.

You understand you, don't you?

Isn't that enough?

The Light and Dark began in Eden. Adam and Eve and maybe Lilith if she existed were the only human things back then. They were the seed of an Imperial thing.

They were a change in how the Imperial things of the world were going to work.

Instead Eve bit the apple.

Human success rests on subverting the natural order of things—on replacing an ever-more-strained conceptual space with the latest, flashiest ontological model. Human existence derives from the natural order of things—on that same conceptual space. To describe this process as unstable understates the case.

—from PRINCIPLES OF THE DARK, by Merriweather James

It is possible to convert a human into something else, and thereby avert the need for that human's suicide. For example, a human can become a Power, an animal, or—with a suitable transfusion of essence—one of the faery kind. One can also convert human life drop by drop into faceless units of labor; for this purpose, the Dark invented money.

—from *PRINCIPLES OF THE DARK*, by Merriweather James

It taught her Light. It made the knowledge of self explode in her. It made the will to live, to strive, to be perfect burn inside her. And she could have made herself immortal then. But she wasn't ready.

She knew better.

It needed *time*; it was too soon, as precious as life was. She was still a child, she couldn't be immortal yet.

So she took the apple to Adam instead.

It was the right thing to do.

You have to understand, it was the right thing to do. She couldn't have known. It wasn't her *fault* any more than it was his.

She didn't know there was something missing from her wisdom.

The Light never does.

So Adam bit the apple, and the apple taught him Dark.

He bit it and he spit out its seeds and the knowledge of the self exploded in him. He began to *want*. He began to *need*.

He suddenly had a craving to *decide* things.

He became wild with it.

He became a namer of things. He became a mad god of power. He was something *incredible*, back then, and he could have made himself *immortal*.

But he never did and he never would.

He was possessed by the Dark.

And while they endured and exalted in their transcendence, each to each, and went walking out for the first time into the *vast and broader* world, the First Lord of the Dark *moldered and writhed* up from the seeds Adam had left behind him. And he claimed Eden as a Chancel. He made their once-perfect home into the Sable Gardens. He *seized* and then seared the fruit of *immortality* away forever from the Earth.

How unforgivable, the Dark that cost us life unending!

The first humans emerged from the Garden into a world of savagery and grime. Beasts and birds and fish hunted, and killed, and ate, and the ones most often eaten were the ones who harmed no others at all. The sky poured water and stony ice and jagged lightning down upon them and the thunder shouted its rage.

The first humans built themselves a shelter from sticks and leaves; and a fire from stones and wood; and they learned to kill what they wished to kill and protect what they wished to protect; and as Eve brought forth a child in suffering and pain, she said:

"Truly, this is an age of miracles."

—from *CARRYOUT*, by Emily Chen



It is the right of any Power of the Light to say: I am the Light, or any Power of the Dark to say: I am the Dark, when acting in service of their Code. They are the hands and eyes of the force that moves them, and it is considered humility—not pride—to set that identity above their own.

—from *THE SOCIETY OF FLOWERS*, by Heather Williams

THE WILD

The Wild is solipsist. It is inward-turning, it is a knowing of itself. It cannot distinguish between the Wild and the world.

Its Magisters arise from nothing. They discover they have form. They discover they are bounded, finite creatures. And so they say: *in Creation I am a prisoner.*

Lo!

They look upon themselves. A dissonance arises. They are not as they expect themselves to be. They are not entirely natural to themselves in every part. And so they say: *the Wild is alien to the world.*

In this, they are of course correct.

That is, to analyze the Wild in these terms and see that they can only see themselves; that their every reaction is a reaction to themselves; that they are ultimately introspective creatures, is to see the obvious origin for their thoughts. But they are still Imperators. They are still primal creatures. If they say they are alien creatures, if they say that they are prisoners of Creation, then perform it must be so.

They are occupied with their own being.

It transfixes them.

They find the hints of structure in their essence and unfold them into laws. They become creatures of absolute dedication to the rules they find inside them; or perhaps they've always been.

What is hurtful to them is dross, waste. To allow the existence of their enemies in the world is a self-destructive habit that they would like to kick.

Creating worlds, Theresa found, was addictive. At night, when she set her work aside and stumbled into bed, she would dream of it: new shapes of reality, new styles of existence, new ontological and theological substructures on which she could build a cosmos. If it were not her work, she knew, and free, she would spend everything she had, and more, so she could keep on creating; and that would not be so bad, or such a waste of a lifetime.

Naturally, they had not perfected the process. Even the management had the humility to understand that—they were mere humans, toying with divinity. Some aspects of the universes they built were primitive, unrefined, and incomplete. These technical flaws paled before the simple truth of their efforts: that each creation caught all the subtle flaws in their beings and magnified them, that each weakness in Theresa's honor appeared a thousandfold in her work. That, in short, for all their beauty, the defining characteristics of Theresa's creations came not from her deliberate efforts but from the dark places in her heart.

All unaware of it, Theresa was building her own Hell.

—from FRUIT OF A POISONED TREE, by *Presbyter Harah Jane*



"Perception is not a passive process. It is part of the work that creates reality. I will demonstrate. In my hand, I hold an apple. At least, with the lights turned on, it is an apple. Now, if you will turn off the lights and tell me what I hold in my hand?"

"...four-armed Shiva the Destroyer dances in a wheel of fire. He stands upon the corpses of his enemies. Never-created, never-dying, ignorance-crushing, life-giving, death-giving, thousand-faced, thousand-named, the wearer of serpents and the tiger's skin..."

"Turn the light on."

"An apple."

"We prefer to leave the lights on at this Centre."

—from RINGING, by *K. C. Danine*

What is helpful to them, of course, is right and good and just.

But fundamentally and symmetrically, as it is necessary that they be, they are *fair*. They are absolute and unwavering in extending their philosophy to all.

You are a prisoner in Creation.

You are an alien to the world.

You must find the hints of structure within you, insists the Wild. You must unfold it into law. Sanity is a prison. History is a prison. Humanity is a prison. You are caught within its web.

The Wild dreams to set you free.

Where the Wild walks things unroot themselves and become self-contained. Symbols bleed into reality. Things stop justifying themselves to one another.

Flowers pull free of the ground. Trees shake off their leaves. Humans discard their faces, grow extra arms, and turn their speech to fire.

Walls dissolve.

Roads twist upwards into the air.

Unreadable icons burn into being from the ether and hang in place, as if to explain (without success) the madness that hangs around them.



"In addition," Henry noted, "our University has a fine theozology department. Few faculty anywhere can rival our professors when it comes to studying and classifying new sorts of God!"

"How many kinds of God are there?"

"One, so far," Henry admitted, "but the Department has just recently constructed a ministerial accelerator that they believe will give rise to as many as seventeen forms of God heretofore unknown."

—from THE LIFE AND DEATH OF HENRY SERRANO, by *Emily Chen*

Field Guide! to...**Tumbleoaks**

This is an oak tree that has lost its roots and its leaves due to an encounter with the Wild. Splitting a tumbleoak open reveals a golden sap that cleanses, purifies, and perfects—comparable to many of the strongest Taoist elixirs. Becoming immortal is likely to involve you in affairs outside your pay grade, so we would recommend auctioning off your find via eBay or Tao.Tao instead.

THE DEEP MYTHIC AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

In the primitive days of life and mind there were no easy distinctions.

Gods found themselves born into the world in the primeval state of the amoeba, the virus, and the mold. They were tangled gods, on the border between life and death, splitting and recombining, twisting about one another, unable to say exactly where one ended and another began, not because they were blind, but because of a genuine ambiguity in their forms.

We see this through the lens of science, squinting back, as the emergence of single-celled prokaryotes from the inanimate—

The dead world, beginning to waken to a state of war.

Listen, for this has always been the truth of life: that it hungers for the death of other life. That from the moment of its birth it seeks to consume the life around it, to subsume the life around it, to subdue the life around it and make it a portion of itself.

In the primeval tangle, the gods that were the greatest predators that survived.

We know this—we should know this, at least—

Empathy was a latecomer to the game.

Empathy came hundreds, even thousands of rounds in. It didn't show up until life became restless at the murder of its lot and sought to take the game in a new direction. It didn't come into play until the minds of the world were stable enough, safe enough, fixed enough in their form that they could imagine being lonely; until the first victors had shown up, taking home the prize that was existence; until life had progressed far enough for its strongest representatives to declare successfully some boundaries to their selves.

"I am the free winds," the lady said, "and wherever a wind blows, there am I. My presence fills this mortal world. I am as pervasive as the air."

"Then you see every horror of the world," said Emmanuel Giraume, "and do not act."

"As you say," she affirmed. "That is the nature of the wind."

—from THE SHORTER ROAD, by Madeline Bacall

The pentagram shifted; the earth-spirit rose; and Anacaona understood that she had made a horrible mistake. She had intended to call Xochitlpetl, the mountain flower, but her diagram was drawn in gold rather than yellow, and instead her work had called forth the hungry mountain, Nezabualpetl. Its jaws gaped wide.

—from THREE WOMAN POISON, by Michael Kay

The gods that came before it knew no loneliness. They were blind even to their misery, and they knew not the edges of their lives.

And so; and so; and so they struggled, for nigh a thousand years of world. The archaea-gods of Earth warred amongst themselves, and drank down all their children. Then there were the gods like algae, breaking forth upon the sea; and finally the New Gods, who learned the Idea "Cooperation" for the first time in the world, and made alliance, and imprisoned the bodies of their primeval forerunners in the mazes of themselves.

Suddenly the tangle of them at the lowest layers of the world was not war and death, but sex; or at least, war and death and sex, for they are still a very early sort of creature, and things to them are not entirely distinct.

These are the "True Gods" we know today, writhing, intertwined and tangled alien sentience at the bottom of the mythic world. To try to pull them from the Mythic by force of attention is like catching the Ouroboros by the tail, or to drag out the phone company by pulling on a cord; your mind cannot hold them all, you drag up only one of their tendrils, one of their extensions, one of their pseudopodia.¹⁰ Their edges blur back into the undifferentiated welter of everything else.

They are the baseline for the world.

They are the breath that first was breathed into our world, the Earth, to make it live.

¹⁰ **ProTip:** don't actually do this to the phone company.

John kept his eyes on the street in front of him. It was safely mundane. In the reflections off store windows, he sometimes caught a glimpse of the wild world behind him. He ignored it. If he forgot the world's boundaries, he knew, it would let glorious and monstrous things creep in.

—from *CARNIVAL OF SHADES*, by Michael Kay

Where is the Deep Mythic?

It is all around us. It is with us every moment. It is the movement that we cannot see. It is the seething sex and war of Things and Life and the pattern of them that is our underlying cause.

We blind ourselves to it because it is too big for us.

We cannot look at a wall and see a tooth of a principle of building. We cannot see how it is in the act of crumbling, how the ceiling and the floor do squeeze it. We cannot see it as a place of infestation for the insects in the walls. We cannot see how buildings themselves are cast up like the mountains from the restless earth, one great long rolling wave of City that is born, crashes against the shores of people, life, and stone, and dissolves away again. We cannot see how the molecules of the thing strive constantly to break their form. We cannot see how the concepts around it seek constantly to dissolve that wall back into the welter of other things, how it will—when we cease to give attention to it—be devoured by the larger structure of our home, be chewed and gulped and swallowed down by the visual field, flowing into the things around it and their edges and the idea of boundaries. We cannot see how its calm stability in our lives is under constant threat and will one day with certainty collapse. We cannot see the history of it, from the moment of the wall's arising to the day of its collapse. We do not know what happened to the brothers and sisters of the drywall at its core.

Life is a power of perception—

Not canon, but philosophy—

And it makes things discrete. But even the things of human making are not discrete; and before the human things there is the ecosystem, in all its tangles.

It eludes the Gods themselves as it does us.

It would be a mistake to believe that they are to themselves things with discrete edges. They are as baffled as are we, though more accepting of it, at where they begin and end.

PROPERTIES OF THE DEEP MYTHIC

- Its locations are ambiguous;
- Its boundaries are ambiguous;
- It is always devouring itself;
- It is always mating with itself;
- Its particulars have free will;
- Attention partially differentiates a thing from its environment.

Reality is fundamentally social; prior to the intervention of culture we exist in an undifferentiated welkin of sensation from which monsters, gods, and motivational forces arise. Whence, then, society? Those who have sliced open its belly and crawled out report, "It is no different: a transient god that swum up to devour us — an aspect of the blasphemous Athop-Helm."

—from the foreword to *HERO MYTHS*, edited by Emily Chen

But their lives are lived in the deeps—in the awareness of this complexity, in a world where all the things are wound together, where all is flesh against flesh, castles and cities made of the same substances as life, where the soldiers and the servitors of the gods are as much their blood cells or their spoken words as individuals in themselves.

Their world in the Deep Mythic is one where the Gods live in palaces that are the bodies of the Gods—their own body, perhaps, or another's. Their armies are creatures grown of their own selves, and linked, if one could trace the lifelines back, to themselves (or other Gods). They walk in caverns hollowed out inside themselves, and look up at the fleshy sunbeat of their heart.

It is a world of unsettled time, rushing and flowing forward, sideways, and back. Their causality is as primitive as their form, shying not from growing in loops and tangles.

And everywhere they are in intercourse with one another, at war with one another, strangling and killing and devouring one another; though less now, and more carefully, for in these days there is a truce.

And beneath this?

Beneath the Deep Mythic is an empty place. Beneath the Deep Mythic is a world un-breathed-into by the divine.

To us it is not comprehensible.

To us it is a timeless, placeless void. It hath not even the darkness, but undifferentiated light; or perhaps the light is the same as the darkness, the two not separate from one another.

No sooner had I consented to wearing human form than these creatures began their chorus of demands. I realized—with dawning horror—that the shape was not enough; also, these perverse entities expected I wear clothes on all occasions, inhale the terrible excesses of their smoke, and eat the transubstantiated flesh of their once-embodied god.

"It is impossible," I told them. "What if I am fighting with a wolf of nakedness? Or need to use my unforgiven sins to purchase the amenities of Hell?"

They looked blankly at the reasonableness of my explanations; they gaped as I explained the stringencies of my daily life; they were adamant and troublesome, in those days, in the Garden of Modern Men.

—from *FORGOTTEN OF OUR LOVE*, by Madeline Bacall

No one has ever lived on Tokhta Hill. No one will ever live on Tokhta Hill. If you ask the train company why there's a stop there, where the tracks sulk amid the cold wet grass, they simply look at you and say, "Some things are best left, dear girl, to those who run the rails."

—from CAREER FABLES, by Melanie Tumberius

And the sky and the sea and the earth are as one thing, there.

And all moments are the same, there.

And there is something there that much resembles life, that has the likeness of life, that is like the body of the world. But it is a corpse-life, a death-life, a life that hath not the divine spark that causes things to be. And so we look upon it and we cannot see it, no more than it could see itself, and we only know that it is there because sometimes it bursts upwards and intrudes upon our world of forms.

The Imperators have chosen this as their battleground.

It is the deepest and most solemn place; that which we name the Spirit World.

There amidst the whiteness of the world their miracles accumulate and form the definition of the place. There they may answer the swift and bloody nothingness of the Excrucians with exultant choruses of power—there, an Imperator's movement in the Now, and in the Past, and in the Future accumulate, build up, form symphonies of miracle that hold the Excrucian force at bay.

There in the Spirit World they stand between the Excrucians and our Earth, and the Excrucians cannot pass; or, at least, they break through only rarely, and in small numbers, and sometimes only as shards and fractions of themselves. There the Imperators are more than the Excrucians' equals, but their superiors. And that is why they have chosen to leave our ordinary world behind, to abandon their bodies in Chancels and guarded by the *Xobilis* to let their minds roam into the Spirit World.

In our world, they are too vulnerable, and yet too precious—each in each—to ever be allowed to die.

DESCENDING

Characters can descend into the Deep Mythic from the Border Mythic by dint of intense and sustained concentration. It is possible to speed this with miracles, but a level 3 *Auctoritas* opposes any quick descent. To find one's way through into the Spirit World beneath is the work of a mortal lifetime; again, miracles can hasten this, and again, a level 3 *Auctoritas* opposes.

These barriers do not oppose Imperators, and are weak against Excrucians; the HG decides how quickly they travel through such climes.

PROPERTIES OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

- ❖ What is, is what you see.
- ❖ Time colludes in curlicues and spirals.
- ❖ Beneath the is an endless coiling madness moves and unives and undwelleth in the dark.

